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[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[SHE REELED IN HER SADDLE AND SLIPPED DOWN INTO THE OUTSTRETCHED ARMS OF GODFREY SOMERVILLE.]

HIDDEN FROM ALL EYES.

CHAPTER IV.

A MONTH passed away, and still Godfrey Somerville lingered at the Hall. One day he disappeared soon after breakfast, and did not return till dinner-time, when he looked so utterly jaded and tired out that the whole family were quite concerned about him. Instead of being flattered by their attentions, he answered their enquiries as shortly as he could, and shrouded himself for the rest of the evening in imperturbable silence. Even Nella's sympathies were somewhat aroused by his excessive paleness; but she took care not to express them either by word or look, being anxious to maintain the defensive demeanour which seemed to suit their relations best. She was hungering for news of Cyril, but was obliged to be content with four sheets of closely-written paper, full of wise advice and prudent exhortations, with which his mother thought it her duty to regale her once a fortnight. There was a postscript to the last letter, which, although it only consisted of a few

lines, was worth more to the anxious heart of the girl who read it, than all the rest of the correspondence put together.

"P.S.—Cyril has gone to stay with some friends of his in Blankshire, so perhaps you may meet; if you do, impress upon him the necessity of wearing a cabbage leaf in his hat to avoid sunstroke."

She looked up from the letter which lay in her lap with a gleam of joy in her soft brown eyes. To think he was in the same county was happiness sufficient, even if chance willed it so that they never met.

Godfrey Somerville was talking to his cousin over the last remnants of his late breakfast, his aunt and uncle having retired long before on pretext of household or other duties.

"Of course we can picnic there, if you like, but it is a tremendously long way off, and I, for one, decline to do it except on horseback."

Meta looked doubtfully across the table.

"But Miss Maynard cannot ride!"

"Then it is high time she learnt; Limerick is as quiet as a lamb; you can ride Turtle, and I, Pearl."

The great Panjamdrum having spoken, it was taken for granted that Miss Maynard would consent, and Meta ran upstairs to see if a certain habit, in a long closed drawer, could not be induced to fit her.

At twelve o'clock the horses came round, and with a beating heart Nella was raised into the saddle most awkwardly by Godfrey Somerville. Ever since her babyhood she had longed to ride; but she could not help being exceedingly nervous as they trotted down the drive, and she found that she was to receive neither instruction nor encouragement from the man who had insisted on placing her on Limerick's back.

"You had better ride by Miss Maynard's side," said Meta, kindly; "I look upon her as your charge to-day."

"Deeply honoured; but I think Peter (the old groom) will be of more use than I can. He taught you to ride, and you sit a horse to perfection!"

A blush rose over the plain, freckled face; praise from Godfrey was sweeter than honey in her mouth, and she forgot everything else in the first rush of joy.

Indignant at being thrown over like this, when Mr. Somerville had engaged to take care of her if she would venture to ride, Nella dropped behind, and placed herself under Peter's wing.

The faithful old servant was only "too proud" to give her any instruction he could, and whilst he was explaining to her the beauty of a light hand, the necessity of sitting square in the saddle, and the rest of it, he told her of his bright, young mistress, who had flown like a bird over gate and hedge, and never failed to be near the hounds, however sharp the run, and however few were in at the finish.

"Bless her kind heart, there never was a purtier sight in the world than little missie on the back o' Pearl; I believe the very hounds knew when she was there, and followed all the truer, because she came after them so close."

"What did she die of; I never heard?"

"It was all along o' the hunting, miss. My lady said she should not go, but Miss Lina was main fond of sport, and Mr. Godfrey backed her up in everything through thick and thin. The end of it was that they brought her home one fine mornin' on a hurdle. It took four on us to carry her, for it was right out there by the Bushes, and the road was very difficult. We laid her on the big table in the hall, being the first place we come to, and Mr. Godfrey come up and took her by the hand. 'Lina,' he says quite dafflike, 'we ought to have gone together; but you've left me behind.' Then he kissed her as if he would have ate her, and gave a loud sob, and fell flat on the floor."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Nella, dislike for the moment being merged in sympathy.

"Ah poor fellow! She would have been the making of him—no doubt of it. He was partial to the very earth she trod on; and now she's in the grave, and the enjoying of himself with her sister. This earth be a very rum place to live in."

"If we did not find some consolations for ourselves, we couldn't live in it."

"You are right, miss. Only I'm an old-fashioned body, and it turns me cold like to see such goin's on."

"Pull yourself together, Miss Maynard," Somerville called out over his shoulders. "We are going to canter over this bit of grass."

Nella's heart fluttered, but she set her teeth, and prepared to enjoy herself if she died before it was over. Fortunately for her, Limerick justified his reputation of being like a lamb, and she reached the road without any mishap, except the loss of a few hairpins. Meta laughed at her untidy hair, but complimented her on her seat.

Godfrey said nothing, but lighted a fresh cigarette.

The hedges were full of blossom, and hung out streamers of wild roses or honey-suckle to greet them as they passed; the sky was without a cloud, the air as soft as a baby's breath. It was a day to make all nature join in one pervading hymn of praise—it was a day to make the prisoner's heart burst to think he was not free to go out into the sunshine.

"What an infernal nuisance!" exclaimed Godfrey; "somebody has come here before us."

An empty waggonette followed by a dog-cart came out of the old grey stone gateway of the Castle just before the party from Somerville Hall turned in.

"The place is quite large enough to hold us both," said Meta, soothingly. "We need not see anything of them, unless we like."

"It spoils the whole thing—just our luck," frowning hard. "If there is one thing I hate more than another, it is being stared at by a lot of idiotic tourists."

"But why are they likely to be more idiotic than we are?" inquired Nella, for the sake of aggravation.

"If you don't know, you can find out. No doubt they will be charmed to have you."

"I am not in the habit of forcing myself on strangers," Meta replied.

"Humph! we were all strangers to you a month ago."

"You were. But I came by invitation."

"The invitation of some—I was not consulted."

"Naturally, as you don't form part of the household."

"I don't know so much about that. Meta, don't I form part and parcel of Somerville?"

"Certainly, and I hope you always may," turning to him with shining eyes.

"I have your good word, little woman, anyhow."

"Yes! and you always will."

"Under any circumstances?" bending forward so as to look into her face.

"Be the circumstances what they may," with touching earnestness.

"There's a friend for you," and he turned to Nella. "Such a rare as can only be found once in a lifetime."

"More than a friend, I mean!"

"What has that got to do with it?" impatiently.

"Only the cousinship evidently led to the friendship."

"And if it did, is it not a source of joy?"

"Not less true, perhaps, but less unexpected. I have taken this road because I believe in the Castle, I may be pleased, but I don't know if I get there."

"You will be surprised when you get there. Did you see whose carriage that was which passed just now?"

"No! I don't know anyone about there."

"Oh! I have just heard of the Arkwrights."

"Arkwrights? No. How do you mean?"

"You might think I was mistaken. Meta, I am awfully hungry. I hope the carriage hasn't been turned with the provisions."

"No! that is it. I know Jimmy would never fail us."

"I am glad to find he hasn't. Before we do anything else, let us discount and feed."

The dog-cart backed was produced and its contents spread out on a snowy cloth under the drooping branches of a weeping willow.

The tree stood on the side of a slope to the right of the ruined castle, whose battlements crowned with ivy formed the foreground to a lovely picture. Nella had never seen anything like it in her life, and sat with parted lips gazing on the rich undulating woodlands, the glistening waters of the rushing river, the old grey-turreted building, whose man had lived and enjoyed the fulness of life in the bygone centuries, and the crumbling wall which had once famed their pride from the eye of the world.

The men, the women, and the children, were dead and forgotten, but the place where they had dwelt, lived after them in undying beauty, telling, though with silent lips, of the splendour and the glory of the past.

"Another glass of champagne, Miss Maynard?"

Godfrey's unmelodious voice roused her from a pleasant reverie, and she answered hastily.

"No more, thank you."

He stooped and quietly filled up her glass as if he hadn't heard.

"I said I did not want it."

"But you will when you hear my toast. Long life and happiness to Cyril Vere and his lovely bride. Drink it, or I shall think you are jealous."

"Jealous!"

"Take care. How your hand shakes! Is it emotion?"

"After riding for the first time in my life it is rather natural."

"True! I had forgotten. You must honour this toast, Meta, as well as Miss Maynard."

"But who is Mr. Vere?"

"Don't you remember him, a yellow-haired Adonis, who is about to fill his empty pockets out of the handy money-bags of an heiress?"

"He is not the man to sell himself," said Nella, bravely, though her cheeks were white.

"If he is going to marry her, he must be fond of her."

"Ah! you are behind the scenes!" leaning forward with an air of interest. "From your own experience, judging by what he did and said, and looked during that last week you spent together, when, no doubt, he opened his heart to you, his dear little cousin. By Jove! she's going to faint!" breaking off in pretended alarm.

"I am only tired—this will revive me," and she drank off her champagne, independently of the toast.

"Come for a little stroll, that will stretch your legs, and do you more good than anything. Meta, I'll come back and fetch you," he called out, just as she was about to follow.

Wondering what could be his motive for wishing to be alone with her, Nella walked by his side in silence. The path was very steep, and every now and then he stretched out his hand to help her, as if really sorry for her fatigue. She did not touch his hand, but she was surprised that he remembered to offer it, as he was usually averse to paying her the smallest attention.

The voices of the so-called "idiotic tourists" could be heard through the wood, but they managed to avoid them by keeping to the left.

When she had reached up against a tree, feeling as if all her strength had departed, she looked where she was standing, and climbed out at eight. Presently he came back.

"You must come," he said, eagerly, "the view is splendid!"

She shook her head.

"I am too tired!"

"It is only a few minutes' walk on!" in a rapid whisper. "I'll wait for it all your life if you don't come!"

"Why—why do you insist on it?"

"Because there was something about, and I don't want to bring this down upon us!"

"What was so urgent in his manner that she yielded, and, motioning to him to go on first, she picked up the skirts of her habit and followed as best she could."

He pulled aside the branches, and putting his arm to her lips, motioned to her to come forward.

With a curious feeling of expectation, she put her head carefully through the opening in the briars, and started back.

There, close in front of her, but on a lower ledge which overhung the valley, was Cyril Vere, looking down with admiration and pity on the beautiful face of a fashionably-dressed woman, which was upturned to his in frank confidence.

"I owe you everything!" she murmured, softly.

He stooped his head with a graceful courtesy peculiarly his own, and raising her hand to his lips said, with a smile,

"I am more than paid!"

CHAPTER V.

Sick at heart Nella stumbled back amongst the thorns. Tearing her skirt on the briars, she hurried down the path with an uncertain, blundering gait, as if she were blindfold, Godfrey following her with an evil smile upon his lips.

"Why did you not speak to him? I thought he was a friend of yours!"

"Because," she said, trying to battle with her bitter pain; "because he was so well occupied!"

"He's a lucky fellow! Wish I had had his chance!"

"Oh, dear! Miss Somerville, let us go home," said Nella, piteously, when they reached the place where they had left her. "I am so tired that I can scarcely stand."

"Miss Maynard has seen a table in the wood, and it has been too much for her."

"She looks as if she had seen a ghost! What have you done to her?"

"Nothing! Come for a stroll, Meta. If we find Miss Maynard's friend we will tell him she is waiting for him."

"Tell him what you like!" she said, coldly.

"I should like to have an opportunity of congratulating him!"

But when their backs were turned she stole into the deepest recesses of the wood, and all necessity for concealment having vanished with their inquisitive eyes, flung herself down on the mossy ground, and cried aloud in her agony.

To see him standing but a few yards from her, in all the pride of his manly beauty, and vigour—to see that the glances of his kindly blue eyes, the kisses of his audacious lips, the wishes and the tenderness of his honest heart, were all for another!

To think that she should stand by unnoticed whilst Cyril Vere, her playfellow, friend, and cousin, devoted all his attention to some one else!

She had not prized them half enough when they were her own undisputed property, but now that they were claimed by another she felt that the world was scarcely big enough to contain her vain regrets.

"Heaven help me!" she sighed, putting her ruffled hair back from her face. "I was lonely enough before, and now I am utterly friendless. He might have told me something of it, and not kept me in the dark. We were always such friends—never meaning anything by our stupid quarrels—never meaning anything but to make it up as soon as we could. And now—now—he won't care if I am cross or not; he won't look for me when he strolls out to have a smoke in the garden. He won't think of me when he pulls out his cigar-case, because she is sure to give him a much better one. He won't—he won't do anything that he used to do in the dear old times."

Tears trickled down her cheeks, as she laid her head on a cushion of moss. Tired out by her long ride, and overcome by the emotion she had suffered since, she fell asleep, and forgot her sorrows in dreams of utterly unattainable joy.

Godfrey Somerville roamed about the ruins trying to content himself with the simple adoration of his cousin; but although he told himself that he hated her, his thoughts roamed perpetually to the girl whose heart had been like an open book to him that summer's afternoon. He wondered if she would throw down her tiny little mask when his back was turned, and cry her eyes out when there was no one there to see.

Meta found him silent and preoccupied, but it was happiness enough for her to walk by his side, to listen to his stray remarks, or even to watch his yawns. In her simple heart Godfrey was the reigning sovereign, and, like the Royalists of old, she thought the king could do no wrong. She claimed nothing from him in return, and found an all-sufficing reward in his somewhat patronizing affection.

Whilst they were wandering about from one delightful view to another Nella slept on, unconscious of everything, with a smile on her pretty lips, two dewdrops on her lashes—unconscious even when Cyril Vere came striding through the undergrowth, looking to right and left with eager glances, till he stopped short with a suppressed exclamation of delight, and a gleam of joy in his eyes. There at his feet she lay, looking as innocent in her pure unsullied beauty as if she had dropped down like a snowflake from the clouds.

A great wave of tenderness swept over his heart, involuntarily he stretched out his arms. "Mr. Vere! Mr. Vere!" came in imperative accents from the level lawn where the carriages were drawn up at the edge of the wood, followed by a deep voice, "Come along, old fellow, are you going to keep us waiting all day?"

He hesitated. A look of infinite longing came into his eyes.

"Self-denial is the pauper's duty!" he murmured, bitterly, as he bent down and took a faded rosebud from the front of her dress.

Her bosom heaved with a deep sigh; her lips parted.

"My darling!" he said, softly, "would to Heaven you were mine!" and afraid to trust

his self-control any longer, he stooped his head to avoid a branch, and hurried back again to those who were waiting for him.

The moment he was gone she woke, and catching sight of his figure disappearing amongst the branches, started to his feet.

"Cyril! Cyril!" she cried, breathlessly; but he did not hear her—the sound of carriage wheels, muffled by the grass, told her that she was too late as she sprang forward in a vain endeavour to stop him.

"Did you call me?" said the mocking voice of Somerville, as he placed himself in front of her. "My name is Godfrey, which, perhaps, you have forgotten!"

"Mr. Vere was here just now, and there was something I wanted to tell him."

"Ah! I saw him, but thought him too well occupied to interrupt."

"Oh! if you saw him, in common charity you might have woke me. I would have given anything on earth to have been awake for five minutes!"

"Even a pair of gloves, which I took for granted he would win."

"Mr. Vere is a gentleman!" throwing back her small head and flashing crimson.

"Certainly; if he had been a lady the sport would have been small. There would be no temptation, and therefore no risk."

"In any case, there could be no risk with him."

"Perhaps not for you, now that Miss Arkwright has come to the fore. And yet I thought you had a rosebud when I last saw you."

She looked down in surprise to find it had gone.

"I suppose I dropped it."

"I suppose he stole it; the risk was greater than I thought," looking at her with a sidelong, penetrating glance from under his heavy lashes.

A blush rose slowly over the whiteness of her neck to cheek and brow. If he stole it he cared to have it, and she was not quite forgotten after all. A delicious smile hovered about her mouth, and a scrap of comfort crept into her heart.

The sight of that smile angered Somerville strangely.

Drawing a flower out of his coat he held it up.

"This dropped from Miss Arkwright's hand as Vere helped her into the carriage. Is it at all like your rose?"

Nella looked at it with dilated eyes.

"It is my rose—I know it by the shade on the leaf!"

"You ought to be flattered that he should think it good enough for Miss Arkwright."

"Of course I am," in bitter scorn.

"But it was cool of him to take it from you. If I had stolen it I should have kept it. Whenever you do give me a flower," watching with cool enjoyment the disappointed quivering of her lips, "I won't pass it on—that I promise you."

"Make your mind easy—you won't have the chance."

"It will be time to refuse it when I ask for it. Don't you think you can wait till then?"

"I should think Miss Somerville was tired of waiting for us. Let us go."

"Am I not the best judge of that? I have only to consult my own wishes, and then I know hers."

"It is shameful of you to trifle with her as you do!"

"My good girl, you don't know what you are talking about. If I did not 'trifle' with her she would collapse and die. There she is," putting aside a branch for Nella to pass. "Her first glance for me—her second for you, see if I'm not right!"

He was right; but she would not own it as she hurried forward to make her apologies.

Meta received them with a placid smile, assuring her that they were just in nice time to get home by the half-past seven o'clock dinner.

Nella stood beside her horse, looking up at him helplessly.

Godfrey helped Meta onto hers—taking care

to be as long about the operation as possible—and then came forward slowly as if he did not relish the office when it had to be performed for her companion.

Instantly resolving that she would have nothing to do with him, Nella asked Peter in a low voice to bring Limerick up to some old stone steps at the entrance to the stable.

"Hulloa! where are you off to?" Godfrey exclaimed, in surprise.

Nella vouchsafed him no answer, but presently rode back in triumph, having scrambled into the saddle unaided.

Finding that his services were not needed, he came up to arrange her habit, and told her that if she would ride on in front with him he would see that no harm came to her.

"Thank you; I depended on Peter before, so I will do so again."

"Then if you come to grief don't blame me," as he put his foot into the stirrup and threw his leg across Pearl's back.

"Let go her head, you idiot!" to Jemmy, the stable-boy, with a muttered oath.

"I will not blame you for good fortune or bad. I should be sorry to think that either depended on you."

"And yet it may—unlikelier things have happened before now."

"I don't understand you."

"And it is not for me to explain."

As they emerged on to a pleasant stretch of grass-land he suggested to Meta that the horses would be all the better for a good gallop.

"It would be very delightful," she said, eagerly; "but not quite safe," she added, regretfully, "for Miss Maynard."

"She has chosen her companion; let her have him all to herself. They can follow us at their own pace."

Having explained their intentions to those behind, they set off at a rapid canter, which soon improved into a gallop. Nella had the greatest difficulty, even with Peter's assistance, in preventing Limerick from following their example; but when he had settled down into a steady trot, she enjoyed the quiet ride home through the lengthening shadows.

The peacefulness of the summer's evening seemed to still the throbbing of her heart, and at a safe distance from the continual annoyance of Godfrey Somerville's presence she had time to collect her thoughts and brace her nerves for whatever might happen next.

If Cyril were really going to be married she would be sure to hear the news in her aunt's next letter. If the girl were an heiress there would probably be no cause for delay, as the insuperable barrier of poverty would be swept away.

All that was left to her was to hope and pray that this stranger, with the beautiful, sorrow-struck face, might bring the blessing of a lasting happiness to his home—that she might look after his comfort, guard his honour, uphold his authority, and be to him all that a model wife should be. And then her eye fell upon the watch-chain dangling from one of the button-holes of her habit, and she knew that, try as she might, she could never pray that any woman should be the same to him as she had been all these years—and might be still if—if she had not been the greatest fool that the world ever held.

When she went to bed that night she put his watch-chain under her pillow, and felt that, so long as she possessed these precious golden links, their two lives were bound together by the sweet irrefragable tie that outlasts legal bonds and ties of blood—the sweet and tender association of the past.

CHAPTER VI.

The next week, when Eleanor Maynard came down one morning to breakfast, she saw a letter in Aunt Mary's neat hand writing lying on the table. She caught it up eagerly, longing to know the worst. Her colour came and went as she broke it open, and her cheeks were quite pale with anxiety before she got to

the end of it; but there was nothing in it of any particular interest—nothing on a higher level than dreary details of the poor parishioners. With a sigh, at once of relief and disappointment, she put it down, and addressed herself to her breakfast. As she raised the cup of coffee to her lips she noticed for the first time that there was a vacant chair opposite to her.

"Mr. Somerville not down yet? I thought I was the latest of all."

"And so you are," said Miss Somerville, with a smile. "Godfrey breakfasted long ago, and went up to town by the 9.15 train."

"Dear me, isn't it very sudden? It was only last night that he proposed that we should go out for another ride!"

"And he hadn't forgotten it this morning. He won't be able to start with us, but Peter is to lead his horse, and we are to meet him at Alverley. If by any chance he should miss the 8.40, he would come by the other line, and we should have to ride on to Coppelstone, which would be double the distance, and make us very late!"

"Then we must pin our hopes on his punctuality?"

"A poor look-out, for Godfrey was never punctual in his life," said Sir Edward, with a sigh.

"Now, papa, don't be so unjust! He only missed the train once the whole month that he stayed with us in the winter!"

"Because I was always 'at' him to be off. But I mustn't prejudice Miss Maynard against him."

"Pray don't, because she doesn't like him too much as it is!"

"Not too much? We don't want that!" with a grave smile; "but just enough, I hope!"

"As much as Mr. Somerville likes me!" said Nella, promptly.

"Then that must be quite sufficient! Don't let Limerick go far to-day, for I took him a good distance myself yesterday; and I fancied he wasn't the thing." So saying, he rose from the table, with the newspaper in his hand. "I cannot think what I have done with the list of horses that Tattersall sent me yesterday!"

Meta jumped up to help her father to look for them; and Lady Somerville asked Nella to come into the boudoir, and see if a favourite inkstand could be mended.

Punctually at three o'clock the horses were brought round, and the girls mounted ignominiously from a chair.

There was no sunshine, but the heat was stifling; and Nella declared that she should like to take a fan with her, as the Empress of Austria did.

"You would drop it, for a certainty, directly Limerick went out of a walk."

"I suppose I should; but it would be very nice to get a breath of air from anything."

"The clouds seem absolutely stationary; but I have often seen them as black as this, and yet we've had no storm!" and Meta looked up at the heavens, with a critical eye, although she intended to meet Godfrey Somerville, whatever the hour or the weather.

They reached Alverley in very good time, but when the train came up, and disgorged its small complement of passengers, Somerville was not amongst them.

"How very tiresome!" exclaimed Meta, her face showing her disappointment, as plainly as if it had been written there in large letters.

"After what papa said about Limerick I daren't take him on to Coppelstone; but it will be a horrid bore to turn back and send Peter on without us!"

"You shan't do that. I'll go home by myself!"

"But won't you be afraid? Supposing Limerick began to kick!"

"But he never does, so why should he begin to-day? I shall go along very quietly, attempting nothing beyond a trot. And if I should come to grief, you needn't send Peter to pick up the pieces. There would be nobody to care if the right pattern were kept!"

"Nonsense! As if I shouldn't! I don't think I ought to let you go"—duty and inclination pulling different ways.

"You don't let me, but I insist upon having my own way. Ta-ta! Mr. Somerville will be delighted to have you to himself." With a little nod she rode slowly down the road, and presently disappeared round the corner.

Inwardly she was extremely nervous, and every time that Limerick shook his head to disturb a fly she thought he was going to run away; but after some time, as he seemed to be as much oppressed by the heaviness of the atmosphere as she was herself, her fears decreased, and her thoughts became less intently riveted on the management of her horse.

How she wished that Cyril could see her, riding all alone on one of Sir Edward's thoroughbreds, as if she had been the most perfect horsewoman in the world! If she reached home in safety she would never be afraid again; and next winter, if Meta would only consent to accompany her, perhaps she would be able to follow the hounds.

She was so engrossed with her daring projects that she failed to notice the approach of a traction-engine till it was almost close upon her. The huge, ungainly monster came slowly towards her, rumbling, squeaking, and puffing forth volumes of steam. Limerick stopped dead short, shaking all over like a frightened child. Terrified out of her wits, Nella tugged at the reins, but without the smallest effect. Limerick lay back his ears, and put down his head, as if preparing for a plunge. Nella, in her terror, never saw that they had stopped the engine, and that one of the men was advancing towards her with the benevolent intention of leading the horse past it; she heard a loud puff, as the steam was let off, and thought that the whole ponderous machine, like a very car of Juggernaut, was coming upon her to crush her to atoms. In desperation she hit the horse smartly with her whip, thinking that anything was better than sitting quietly there to be smashed. In an instant Limerick threw up his head, caught the bit between his teeth, and bolted. Down a road, at right angles to the one in which they had left the machine, he went at a mad gallop, whilst Nella, with a face white as death, clung on to the pommel with her knees, trying to remember the old groom's instructions even in the midst of her peril.

The labourers looked after the runaway in some perturbation, shook their heads, and went back again to the engine, remembering that they were due at Mr. Wilson's farm by half-past five, and knowing that they could do "no mortal good to the poor girl by speerin' arter her when she worn't in sight."

On, past flying haystacks and hedges, past little dogs, which yelped and barked as if they enjoyed the sport, past an old church and silent churchyard, past gardens where the roses were hanging in crimson clusters, past empty cottages, whose inmates seemed to be fast asleep—on, with the fear of death always staring in her face—on, with the love of life growing deeper and more strong with every moment that brought her nearer to its end!

To increase the horror of her position the storm, which had been threatening all day, broke overhead in an awe-striking growl, and, just as Limerick was beginning to recover the shock to his nerves, a flash of lightning darted across the road with a blinding glare. Shying violently, in a way that nearly unseated his rider, he leapt forward with increased velocity.

"Oh Heaven, have mercy!" gasped the poor girl, feeling it impossible to hold on any longer. Strength and courage were failing fast, only the spurious energy of despair lent any power to her stiffened muscles. Her hat had fallen off, and, being attached by a cord to one of the buttons of her body, bobbed about in such a way as to perturb her horse still further; her hair was streaming down her back—every hairpin having been lost in her wild career—and her very lips were white with fear. Still she clung to her saddle with all the determi-

nation of her will, knowing nothing of the course they were pursuing, or of the country they had reached, only praying that at the end she might not be dragged along in a crippled state, but die—simply die—if die she must!

Darker, and still darker grew the sky, the lightning flashed through the dense foliage of ever-green oaks, which met in a sombre arch overhead. Without knowing it she had entered the private grounds of a gentleman's place. She was almost past consciousness of outward objects, when a loud exclamation sounded above the roar of the thunder. Someone darted forward and caught her bridle-rein—someone called her by her name in a tone of the greatest surprise. The revelation of feeling was too great—in danger she had behaved with presence of mind—in safety she gave way. Her eyes closed, she reeled in her saddle, and slipped down into the outstretched arms of Godfrey Somerville.

As her face touched his, and her bright hair fell in a shower of gold over his shoulder, his lip quivered. An expression of dismay and perplexity swept across his features, as he muttered beneath his breath,—

"What on earth brought her here?"

(To be continued.)

Now and then one sees a face which has kept its smiles pure and undefiled. It is a woman's face which has trace of a great sorrow over it, till the smile breaks. Such a smile transfigures; such a smile, if the artful but knew it, is the greatest weapon a face can have.

A PIANO-STOOL COVER.—A pretty way to cover a piano-stool which is much worn, is to cut a piece of broadcloth or felt so that it will fit the top. This may be left plain or may be ornamented with a vine in appliqué-work. Around the edge of this sew a regular little lambrequin. Have the foundation of broadcloth or felt, or of velvet. This may be in one piece, cut in points, scallops, or in separate pieces, with the edges pinked or button-holed, and with a different design in appliqué or Kensington embroidery, in each part; or, if pressed for time, the lambrequin will be handsomer if the design is the same on each part. Another way to make the lambrequin is to buy a strip of the fringed border intended for the edge of burlap mats, work the design woven in the border with bright coloured worsteds, and it is a pretty finish for the stool-cover.

HIGHEST BUILDING IN EUROPE.—Hitherto the Hospice of the great St. Bernard, which stands eight thousand two hundred feet above the level of the sea, has enjoyed the distinction of being the most elevated inhabited building in Europe. The honour, according to the builder, it can no longer claim. During the past year the city authorities of Catania, in Sicily, have caused to be erected near the summit of the great volcano, Mount Ætna, an astronomical observatory, which stands two thousand nine hundred and twelve metres above the sea level, or fully one thousand feet higher than the Hospice of St. Bernard. The structure is nine metres in height, and covers an area of two hundred square metres. It consists of an upper and lower story, and is built in a circular form. In the lower story there rises a massive pillar, upon which is placed the great refracting telescope. The lower story is divided into a dining-room, kitchen, and store-rooms, intended for the accommodation of astronomers and tourists visiting the establishment. The roof consists of a movable cupola or dome. From the balconies of the upper story a prospect of vast extent and grandeur is presented. The spectator is able to see half the island of Sicily, the island of Malta, the Lipari Isles, and the province of Calabria, on the mainland of Italy. The observatory is erected upon a small cone, which will, in the case of eruption, protect it completely from the lava stream which always flows down on the opposite side of the volcano.

BROWN AS A BERRY.

CHAPTER XXIX.—(continued.)

BERRY hangs her head, and into her pale cheeks mounts a crimson glow of shame. She cannot bear to be even falsely suspected of a want of proper pride, and to be accused before a third person is doubly galling.

He is suffering too, and in despair at his own impotence. How can he save one sister and not sacrifice the other? In his colonel's face he reads such rigid disapproval that he is aghast.

"Berry, go to the house—to my room. I will speak to you there."

"She is turning meekly to go, but this is beyond Ronald's power of forbearance. He cannot see her wrongly suspected—perhaps banished from the home she has found and cast on the world.

From Colonel Chester she can expect no mercy. He is a very Caesar as regards the purity of women, and would not be likely to allow Berry to remain near his wife, thinking so badly of her as he does.

Ronald is bewildered, well-nigh distraught. Words are forced from his mouth that frighten him when said.

"If Berry will marry me—" he begins, but cannot proceed.

She turns upon him with a look of piteous reproach.

This is worse than all, and makes her position still more difficult. But Colonel Chester's face lightens and he smiles triumphantly. The child is fitly punished for her temerity—if, indeed, she has dared to deceive him—to come between him and his wife, so efficiently sheltering her from detection and his just wrath.

"If that is all," he says, addressing Ronald; "you need have no fear. I will answer for her and say 'yes.'"

"By what right?" flashes out Berry, her rage rising above her fear.

"I will take her answer from herself, if you please, sir," says Ronald, respectfully, and yet with a degree of firmness not usual from his lips.

Colonel Chester smiles again, this time satirically.

"I am sorry to take any of the romance from your wooing. We old fogies are apt to appear when least welcome."

He turns away whistling, and begins to strip the bark from a near tree, scrupulously keeping his back turned towards them. But they are silent, only sending one to another glances of mute perplexity and distress. At last the Colonel turns again impatiently.

"Come, Berry, you were not so shy when I saw you from below. If I saw aright, and if you wrote the letter that I read, there can be no doubt as to your reply. Will you marry him—or not?"

He speaks carelessly, but there is a threatening accent in his tone which she is not slow to read. She sees it all. He doubts her word and is proving her. She must consummate her deceit or have done it all in vain. Either she must give up all for Eve, or save herself and let her sister bear the penalty of her own folly. Probably her selfishness would not reach the summit that it does, were it not for the child. For his sake no stain must rest on his mother's name.

Colonel Chester's feelings are so mixed that he scarcely knows whether it is anger or relief that he feels, when, more by sight than sound, he realizes she has answered:—

"Yes." Jealousy is so strange a passion, and curiosity so great a part of it, that his desire to know the truth is almost as keen as his anger. Both are baffled. He has no proof, he can only suspect; but with what happiness would he prove Eve faithful.

How is it he cannot win her love? At least he has removed this lover from her path and rendered him harmless—if lover he was. Yet

why should he doubt? Women are proverbially fickle, fond of intrigue.

With these complex thoughts in his mind, he grasps Ronald's unwilling hand and congratulates him.

"If she is as devoted a wife as she has been a sister, you will be the most fortunate man alive," he concludes, with an inscrutable expression in his eyes that neither of them fathom.

"I am sure she will be all that I could wish," says the younger man, with an attempt at gallantry.

"No doubt," drily. "And now let us go and tell the news to Eve. It will be a pleasure to her as well as a surprise."

Ronald demurs, and tries to excuse himself, urging at last with desperate pleasantry that he is too new to his position to comport himself with proper dignity.

But Colonel Chester waves every plea aside.

"You will take away the edge of Berry's happiness and pride if you are not there to help her to tell the story," he says, with affected *bonhomie*.

And then feeling, maybe, that he ought to stand by the bride he has so strangely won, Ronald reluctantly gives way.

They move on three abreast, and slowly descend the hill, Colonel Chester looking like a stern gaoler as he walks between and they prisoners, in fact as well as fancy.

Crossing the main road that runs outside their compound they meet Mrs. Lee-Brooke, and Colonel Chester stops to ask for her congratulations.

They are given gushingly; and Berry and Ronald have to listen, trying to smile a reply, while their tormentor stands by watching with sardonic enjoyment.

But his revenge does not reach its climax then. Not until he brings them both into his wife's room is his rancour satisfied.

Eve is there, in her out-door garb still. She is frightened at first, thinking that their advent thus together can bode no good, but fear is quickly lost in anger when her husband speaks. At first she does not understand. Then gradually the truth dawns upon her. She darts a disdainful glance at Berry's downcast face as a wild suspicion comes into her mind. Has her sister been scheming for this all the while? In her agony she has not time to reflect, she only knows that she is being tortured to the death and cannot hide her pain.

She looks from one to another, seeing none—not Ronald's supplicating glances, nor Berry's eyes, which implore her to keep calm and trust her still.

As in a dream her husband's voice breaks through the pregnant silence. He has thrown himself into a chair and leans back in it lazily, apparently noticing nothing, but in reality losing not an item of what is taking place.

"My dear, you are dense to-day. Don't you see that they are waiting for your good wishes?" he remarks, reprovingly.

"I—I wish them all the happiness they deserve," says Eve, coldly.

And so saying, sweeps haughtily from the room.

CHAPTER XXX.

"I HELPED you, Eve; it is your turn to help me now."

Berry has told her sister all, and at last persuaded her to believe that it is by no connivance of her own that this engagement has been brought about.

"What can I do?" helplessly.

"If I knew I should not ask. Only suggest something—anything. You were quick enough at suggesting once!"

Berry's patience is worn out, and her sweet temper for the moment soured, or she would not cast that old affair of the letter in Eve's teeth. She is half maddened by the shrewdness with which they have been trapped, and the knowledge that matters cannot continue

so. Yet how is she to escape from the mesh in which she finds herself?

Eve, naturally and naively selfish, thinks only of her own perplexity, and does not attempt to dissemble the fact.

"And you think Alex suspects?"

"I suppose he does. He spoke with such spiteful intent."

Eve grasps her sister's arm convulsively, and looks imploringly into her eyes.

"Berry, having done so much, you must not desert me now. It would have been better to have refused your help at once."

"And you wish me—to marry—Ronald May?"

She speaks the words slowly, and with a half-dawning sense of amusement, being irresistibly reminded of the Shangalla women who are said to woo new wives for their own husbands.

Certainly, if a woman decides to marry a man who is already mated, she could not have a more competent authority on her virtues or his vices than his wife might be—if she spoke the truth.

"Of course I don't wish it," is the peevish reply. "You must think I have no heart. But I know what Alex is. If you refuse now, he will infer at once that all was false we said. He is so suspicious. You would be sent away, and we—what should we do?"

"Anything is better than living with an unloved husband!" declares Berry, stoutly.

But Eve shakes her head. She likes the comforts of her luxurious home, and has no mind to lightly lose them.

"Then again," she goes on, presently; "you say that Alex told it to Mrs. Lee-Brooke. If so, it is all over the station by this time."

"True," admits Berry, dolefully. "What a day that poor little pony of hers will have! It will want an extra feed of grain."

"I don't know how you can jest about it," severely.

"Did I jest? If so, it was a very bitter jest. I never felt less like merriment in my life."

"It is far worse for me."

"I don't see that. Yours is a sentimental sorrow, mine a thoroughly practical one. I would rather mourn the loss of a lover than the unwilling gain of a husband."

"You know nothing at all about it," sharply; and then she adds, persuasively: "Ronald is so good and kind. I know you would never regret it."

"Ronald would scarcely be flattered at your praise of him at such a time, and for such a purpose. I think he would rather you were less cautious—more willing to risk something for his sake; or is it a case of 'the dead say nothing except what is good'?"

"Berry! how can you say such things?" cries Eve, honestly shocked.

"I scarcely know what I say. I know what I am doing—ruining my life!"

Then Eve bursts into tears, and refuses to be comforted until Berry has promised to keep quiet, for a time at least, and do nothing to further arouse Colonel Chester's suspicions.

The ayah is dismissed that same day without explanation. She attempts to defend herself, but Eve cuts her short directly.

"I have found no fault with you, and desire no excuses. It is simply I do not require your services longer; that is all."

She gives her a month's wages, and a chit (character), not liking to refuse it after the injustice she has done her before, and the woman with native cunning remains quiet until she has received both.

Then she breaks out into a torrent of invectives, which happily are not understood. Only from words caught now and then, which they recognize, they guess what is the truth.

She had never forgiven the aspersion Eve had cast upon her honesty, and had evidently only gone into her service to do her all the injury she could; but she is going, and with her absence things may even now come right.

Before she leaves, however, she speaks to the colonel, and he in turn interrogates his wife.

Eve answers haughtily, and declines to gratify his curiosity.

"Surely it is my own affair, and does not call for interference on your part."

"The woman complained—" he begins, apologetically.

"Servants always do complain when they are sent away," interrupts Eve, drily.

"No doubt; but in this case—"

"In this case, and all others connected with my own maid, I shall please myself."

She speaks with a decision born of the obstinacy weak natures invariably possess, and he sees that his interference does no good.

"I suppose I must not even ask a question?" he says, in an injured tone.

"You may ask what you please, but I do not promise to answer it."

"I should only like to know how the woman was unfortunate enough to displease you?"

"I disliked her, personally, always. Yesterday she gave real cause for my doubt of her trustworthiness by being absent from the bungalow without permission when I was out."

"Ha!"

An interjection only, but full of wonder and a little dismay. How much does she know, and how far were the woman's accusations of her justified; or were they all groundless—the offspring of a malicious invention!

Eve watches him with interest.

"Have you any further inquiries to make?" she asks, satirically.

"None!"

"You are satisfied?"

"Quite!"

She turns to go, but he catches her in his arms, and kisses her passionately, even angrily.

"Eve! Eve! if I did not love you so I should hate you!"

"Do neither," she answers, coolly, disengaging herself from his embrace with only the faintest blush. "It is not necessary after a year and a-half of married life."

And with a smile, half careless, half coquettish, she leaves him.

To Berry comes that same day an unexpected deliverance, which, though temporary only, is nevertheless very welcome.

Lady Blanche Lennox calls, and, seeing the girl's wistful face, insists upon taking her back with her at once.

She lives two or three miles out of the station, and, mostly occupied with her babies, does not often drive in. She frightens Colonel Chester and Eve into letting Berry go, by commenting upon her altered looks, and declaring that nothing but the change of air she can offer will succeed in bringing back the roses to her cheeks.

"What have you been doing to her, Eve," she asks, reproachfully, "to make her grow so pale?"

Mrs. Chester blushes guiltily, and cannot answer with a jest; but startled into remarking now, for the first time, how fragile her sister had become, is moved to use all her influence to gain for her what she so sadly needs—change and rest.

She even condescends to cajole her husband. "Will it bore you very much to be left alone with your wife?" she queries, archly, laying her little jewelled fingers on his arm.

He looks at her strangely.

"I was not thinking of myself, but of Ronald May."

"The course of true love never did run smooth; why should it in his case? If he has no worse obstacles to surmount than this two or three days' absence, he will be lucky indeed!"

She speaks with well-feigned indifference, and, having no further objection to offer, he reluctantly consents, leaving Lady Blanche and his wife victorious.

Berry breathes freely again when she gets beyond the cantonment boundary. The air seems fresher and more pure, cleared of the atmosphere of deceit in which she has lately lived, and she is really glad to escape from

the society she found so uninteresting, so irksome.

It seems as though she had been acting a part ever since she came, and the last role that has been given to her is infinitely more distasteful than the rest.

How is she to pretend affection for Ronald May, or even sufficient regard to justify the step she is supposed to be about to take? She has always liked him well before, but now that love, or the pretence of love, is required of her, she can only give him hate. She has no intention of ultimately marrying him, she has only promised to dissemble for a time.

When this probation is past and once more she can be her real self, she will forget all this—or only remember it as a bad dream, that was dreamed long ago, and has almost lost its terror.

Ronald will go back to England, and Eve will be removed then from all temptation to be untrue. And she herself? What will be her fate in those days to come?

Captain Carew has first to be dismissed, and afterwards she will be free to deplore blindness, and the falseness that caused it, for all her life.

But will he come? Or was his promised visit only a repetition of those perjured vows with which he broke her sister's heart?

Her heart shall not be so frail. He shall not have the triumph of ever knowing what she has suffered for his sake. She will show to him that the fair, outward seeming which made Margaret die, declaring him to be true, has not imposed on her.

There is such a game as "quits," and if he really loves her, through that love she can avenge herself and her sister too.

But will he come? She grows half angry at her own weakness as the question recurs again and again, ringing in her ears like the burden of an old song which someone we have loved has sung to us in the past.

"To love or have loved, that is enough. Ask nothing further. There is no other pearl to be found among the dark folds of life. To love is a consummation."

The words of a favourite author flash across her mind, and she feels aggrieved that once she believed it true. How different she knows it now; how unlike what poetry describes it. Surely the complete—

"'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all,"

is the most misleading ever written.

To her both love and loss have been an agony. No past pleasure can compensate for the present pain. It does not seem as though even the future could ever bring her peace.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The next morning is spent in idleness, and in the afternoon when the sun is sinking in the west through a heaped mass of radiant golden clouds, Lady Blanche takes Berry over her garden, which is lovely now with big bushes of heliotrope and lemon plants, that have almost grown to trees. There is a perfect blaze of geraniums: one of vivid scarlet hue climbing over the little bungalow wherever the passion-flowers and honeysuckle have left it room. The roses, too, are coming out again in new luxuriance; the scent of violets and mignonne making redolent every passing breeze.

Stephanotis and gardenia, that in England only grow under glass, fostered by artificial heat, here blossom freely in the outside air, almost wildly as it seems, side by side with lavender and stocks, and the homelier cottage flowers that scarcely need so powerful a sun.

Berry admires everything, and says so with such evident sincerity that Lady Blanche is delighted.

"I do all my gardening, with a cooie only for the rougher work. It is a pleasant occupation before breakfast and in the evening."

"You find it lonely sometimes?"

"No, I miss my husband dreadfully, of course, but then I have the children with me

always. You have no idea of the extent of my farm-yard either. What with that and reading and writing the daily letters to and from the plains, I find enough to do."

"You are a very happy woman," wistfully. Lady Blanche smiles, as she stoops to brush a beetle from the heart of an open crimson rose.

"Why not? We are all well, and the separation will not be for long. You doubtless think it a negative kind of happiness, but you are too young to know from experience what far worse evils might befall one than mere dulness."

Berry is silent. An uneventful life like this possesses positive charms when compared with the unfortunate adventures into which she has been forced; she has been "sufficiently instructed" by "love and grief" to appreciate even that somewhat colourless blessing of content.

She sighs, and starts from a reverie to find Lady Blanche regarding her curiously.

No questions are asked then, but in the evening, after dinner, when the servants have all saluted and disappeared, leaving the bungalow to the privacy which in India is so seldom enjoyed, the elder woman motions the younger to bring a footstool near, and composes herself to hear the confidence she invites.

"Now tell me all about it, Berry?"

"About what?" evasively.

"Everything. There is something to tell I know."

"Then perhaps you can guess what it is?"

"I daresay I can come very near it," smiling a little as memories of her own girlhood sweep across her mind; "I suppose you are in love!"

"Lady Blanche!" exclaims Berry, reproachfully. "I did not expect such an absurd, such a mawkish supposition from you."

"Then it is not so?"

"Of course not!" blushing violently.

"Then, Berry, what is it?"

"Nothing."

"You have no news at all to tell me?"

"None."

And then reflecting that sooner or later the fact of her engagement must become known, she adds, somewhat shamefacedly,—

"Unless you care to hear that I am going to be married."

"Care to hear! Child, what has come to you that you should doubt it? It is the very best news in the world. Who is it, dear?"

"Ronald May."

Lady Blanche looks rather discomposed. She has heard something of Ronald's disappointment at Eve's marriage, and rumour of a subsequent flirtation scandalising Hani Tel.

"I thought—" she begins, blankly.

"You thought he was in love with Eve?"

"I understood he admired her," is the cautious reply.

"Everyone admires Eve. That is nothing. My choice of a husband would be a limited one if it was only to comprise those who did not."

"But—"

"You see," goes on the girl recklessly. "I am not good-looking enough to get a lover at first-hand. I could not expect it."

"You are good-looking enough for any thing," returns Lady Blanche, decidedly, as she gazes with almost motherly tenderness into the great grey eyes that are shining like stars in her excitement.

Berry shakes her head despondently. She remembers how John Carew loved Margaret first, and that the husband they are trying to give her now belongs heart and soul to Eve.

"You only say so out of kindness—out of pity. My sisters were always better loved than I; and I—I—I was always the ugly duckling."

She lays her head in Lady Blanche's lap and weeps without restraint; not so much for her lack of beauty as because the soft white hand that is smoothing down her hair is the first tender touch she has felt since Mrs. Holmes,

kissed her when she said good-bye—and she has suffered so keenly since.

Lady Blanche does not attempt consolation. She lets her weep on undisturbed, knowing that tears bring their own relief.

The skies are dark and moonless, only illumined by vivid flashes of summer lightning that constantly occur. The few stars that shine are pale and lustreless. All nature is still, not even a momentary awakening of the wind rouses the trees and flowers into life. There is a sadness in the very air, as though an angel had died in Heaven and all the worlds were grieving.

Presently Berry raises her head.

"How stupid you must think me," she says, with a strangled sob.

"My poor child, dear child. I am so sorry to see your pain."

The gentle pitying tones bid fair to break down Berry's fortitude again.

"Don't talk about it, please. I cannot bear it. I am not so very unhappy, only foolish and—and rather unfortunate."

"And yet you told me you were not in love!" says Lady Blanche, with an accent of reproach, thinking, not unnaturally, perhaps, that jealousy of her sister has caused this great distress.

"Have I contradicted myself now?" bitterly.

"I don't understand; but oh! Berry whatever you do never—never marry without affection. It is certain and everlasting misery!" she continues, earnestly, and then relapses into puzzled thought.

There is something wrong she can see, but what? It is always difficult to unravel the intricacies of a woman's heart; and in Berry's case doubly so, for she is never much given to confidence at any time, and now seems most determinedly mute. There is an old saying, that "few men are to be trusted with their neighbour's secrets, and no woman with her own," but it does not prove so here.

Lady Blanche would so willingly give her help at any cost; but how can she, when she is ignorant where it is needed and why? She lives so far away that she has not been able to notice for herself, and nothing has been told her yet. She must perforce respect the girl's wish for silence, and when she speaks again it is on a different subject.

"Who is this 'other Mrs. Chester' about whom all society is talking now?" she questions, curiously, and by chance has lit upon a theme that to Berry is next in interest to the one thing they have lately left.

"I wish I knew," she answers, quickly. "I have such a strange feeling about her, and so has Eva. It is as bad as having a double—one of those mysterious *doppel-gangers*—I should have thought were confined to Germany alone. I detect mysteries!"

"And is she one?"

"I think so; no one knows her antecedents, and she has no friends apparently; only the acquaintances made at the hotel."

"Chester is not a very common name," thoughtfully.

"No; yet I cannot help fancying somehow that she is not unknown to Alex; he denies it, but—"

"But you never liked Colonel Chester. I remember my husband told me how you had nicknamed him Bluebeard, and prophesied a dismal end for Eva."

"Not more dismal than it has proved," thinks the prophetess, ruefully; and reflects too that her prophecies, like the proverbial curses, have also come "home to roost"; but aloud she remarks: "The oddest thing is, that Eva declares she stares at her so queerly whenever they meet—and she is no often walking past our bungalow."

"It looks almost as if she were a poor relation of the Colonel's and he were ashamed to own her."

"Oh! no; I don't think that. He has no such small vices. It is rather as it might be if he were his cousin, or his sister, and had done

something wrong. He would never forgive a fault."

"He is a singular man."

Berry nods.

"He is, indeed," she assents, grimly.

"Is he good to you, Berry?"

"Oh! very. Has he not provided me with a husband? and—and could a mother do more?"

She stops abruptly; something rising in her throat that forbids her jesting further. Her heart is so sore still that it quivers even at her own ungentle touch. She jumps quickly to her feet as the clock in the bazaar strikes the hour of eleven.

"Would Major Lennox ever believe that you and I—I of all people—had been talking sentiment in the dark for two long mortal hours?" she asks, blithely.

But Lady Blanche only smiles, and does not respond in words. Perhaps she feels that in very truth, literally and metaphorically, she has been "talking sentiment in the dark."

"If," says Lady Blanche, the following morning, as they linger over their second breakfast—"if I had only known you were engaged I would not have invited a young, good-looking bachelor here to meet you!"

"And you have done so?"

"Yes, he has not long come out; and we were children together long ago. I wanted so to see him again. Your coming was a good excuse, and would, I thought, prevent him from being too much bored by my senile reminiscences."

"And so you promoted me to *chaperone*?" says Berry, with a languid smile.

"Nonsense, child! He is like a younger brother to me, and I never, even in my youthful days, affected boys."

"No more do I now. Why should you spoil all our pleasant gossip by introducing a third destroying element?" in an injured tone.

"I think you will like him when you meet; he used to be very nice, dear old Jack; and, after all, he is scarcely a boy. He must be past thirty now."

"Then it may safely be inferred he has passed his first infancy?"

"Of course; I forgot how time flies. Your father knew him well, too, by-the-bye; but you will not remember that—and I think you were at school then."

"What is his name?" asks Berry, carelessly, not guessing that the answer will mean so much to her.

"Captain Carew. I always called him Jack; but he is older and graver since, and I shall hardly dare to do so now. I might make a compromise and call him John."

"Yes, you might do that. I daresay I know your friend already; I came out in the same ship as a Captain Carew."

"In the *Arcturus*?"

"Yes."

"Then, of course, it is the same; how delightful! Now we can both bore him with reminiscences of different times."

"Poor fellow! what has he done to deserve such a fate? I most absolutely decline to make one in so diabolical a plot. Such maliciousness is unworthy of you, Lady Blanche."

"Don't you be more cruel still. Don't flirt with him, Berry!" is the playful retort.

"I flirt with him!"

A scornful laugh and a toss of a curly head as Berry busies herself in arranging a specimen-glass in front of her plate.

She has profited well by her experience of late, and acts the part of indifference so well that Lady Blanche believes in it, and suspects nothing. She has not seen those big eyes dilate and suddenly droop; nor does she know that when first John Carew's name was mentioned, the girl's fingers had so tightly clenched that the nails had entered into the flesh. The little, soft, pink palm is even bleeding slightly when, with some trivial excuse, Berry rises quickly, leaving the table and the room.

CHAPTER XXXII.

CAPTAIN CAREW is here. Berry has spoken to him, and even placed her hand in his without showing any sign of the emotion that she feels.

She looks him calmly in the eyes as she asks him in a softly and modulated voice, with just the right amount of courtesy and indifference, how he had fared since she saw him last.

She has been prepared for this, and has weighed well in her own mind how she will receive him.

But he is thunderstruck. Not having the clue to her conduct he cannot understand why she has so quickly changed. It is as though she had dealt him a blow when she smiles up at him in such evident unconcern.

There is not a trace left of the pretty embarrassment with which she bade him farewell, and the well-bred coolness that has taken its place finds no favour in his eyes.

If he ever thought her too impulsive, too lacking in *savoir faire*, he retracts that opinion now and repents it in dust and ashes.

What would he not give to see again the mantling blush and kindling eyes that were formerly aroused by his slightest word.

Nemesis has come upon him indeed, and he is too overwhelmed to ask himself whether it is also deserved.

It is late in the afternoon when he arrives, and when night comes he has had no chance of spaking to her alone. Nor even the next day is he more successful in his efforts. She avoids him persistently, but without apparent intention.

If, however, Berry proves cold and unenthusiastic, Lady Blanche is hospitably itself. She insists upon treating him as an invalid, and tempting his healthy appetite with all sorts of dainties at all sorts of impossible hours.

"If I were really an invalid you would kill me!" he protests, laughing.

"Nonsense, Jack! you must be ill, whether you feel so or no, after grilling in the plains all this time!"

The compromise has not been effected after all, and she still calls him the old name by which she knew him when a boy.

Those pleasant days when we were children together! How light-hearted we were then, how free from care—and yet, slowly, "I would not have them back."

"You do not repent having elected to 'follow the drum'?"

"I? oh, no! How could I?" with a fond involuntary glance towards the room where two curly heads are pillowed, quietly asleep.

John Carew, remembering her stern old father, the earl, and the shifts to which they were often put to make the alien's pomp and poverty agree, is not surprised that she is happier now.

Besides, she married for love, and he is in that state of adoration bordering on imbecility when a man thinks matrimony the paradise it was meant to be at first.

"You are a very happy woman, Blanche!" he says, using something like the words Berry had used the day after she arrived.

"Of course I am! Did you doubt it? Or is happiness an uncommon thing that you should both comment upon mine?"

"Was Miss Cardell struck by your felicity, too?" he queries, lightly; but waiting eagerly for the reply he is hoping Berry will give herself.

She is so silent, and the very sound of her voice is sweet in his ears, however coldly she may speak.

They are on the verandah. He is leaning back in a long peg chair, while the two ladies are in smaller, but not less luxurious seats. Berry is farthest away from him, and has not glanced once in his direction since they have been out. She is listening to their conversation with a queer mixture of jealousy and impatience, but does not betray anything of either. Her hands are clasped in her lap, her lips tightly compressed. It is Lady Blanche who answers now.

"Berry said the same as you. I am afraid

you think me a very disreputable grass-widow to be so content away from my husband."

"He is coming up soon?" asks Captain Carew, absently.

"Yes, he is coming up soon!" nodding brightly. "And now I must have a peep at the bairnies. They ask me every morning if I have been in."

She gathers up her gown and goes into the house, leaving her guests together.

It is a lovely night, nearly as bright as day. A canopy of golden stars is spread above, and the new moon, caught in a tangle of her own silvery rays, seems loth to be released. The trees even lose a little of their sombre gloom, being faintly touched with the light. The air is cool, though breathless, and soft with languorous scents. Only beyond the darker mountains the snow hills raise themselves like pale gray ghosts from a mist of white encircling clouds, and give a tinge of sadness to the scene.

Berry had risen from her seat impulsively when Lady Blanche left, and then half-hesitates again. It is such an obvious confession of weakness to fly from his presence so. And yet she feels the danger of remaining. She is not afraid of giving in to his prayers, or of proving weaker than she is wise; but she would not willingly let him know the pain that is in her heart for the love of him. He looks so good and noble, worthy of even more than she has given him. She finds it hard to doubt his honour when thus brought face to face with his candid eyes and the sweet firmness of his mouth, that surely could speak only truth.

"Miss Cardell—Berry!" begins the unconscious culprit, humbly.

But his words break the spell, and end her indecision. With one startled look and an unintelligibly murmured excuse she breaks away and vanishes inside, leaving him dumb-founded, and more at sea than ever.

Is it that he has been too long in coming, and her pride has thus been hurt? Or are his first suspicions correct, and is she trying to evade the half-promise that she gave, and now has wholly broken. She had led him to come here with a definite ground for hope. Why does she ignore it now?

He would be perhaps justly indignant could he see the girl that evening as she scribbles a pencil note and despatches it with feverish haste. Only two lines, and addressed to Mrs. Chester.

"Send for me at once, John Carew is here."

And yet he would forgive her, even in his wrath, for the hot tears that fall and nearly blur the written words are ample proof that she is suffering too.

She looks too small and delicate to have Eve's battles to fight against the world as well as her own.

After all Captain Carew gains the chance he seeks. It is always difficult to avoid a *l'été-été* when one person is bent upon it and both are living in the same house—in a bungalow it is nearly impossible.

Berry is in the dining-room arranging the flowers for the table when he enters, and standing between her and the door prevents her escape.

"Miss Cardell, may I speak to you a moment?"

"Certainly, Captain Carew! What have you got to say?"

She is rather frightened, but on the whole tolerably self-possessed. There is no moon-light now, nothing seductive in the surroundings to stupefy her senses and make her listen to him leniently, even against her will. Amidst these more prosaic surroundings she can defy him, and the arts which won her heart away from her only five months ago.

But now that Captain Carew has permission to speak, and the opportunity as well, words fail him, and he is mute.

"Will—you will give me a flower, Miss Cardell?" he stammers out at length.

"Is that all? Yes, I think I can venture so far, even although they are not mine to give. Which will you have, Captain Carew?"

"If a beggar might be a chooser, I should ask for the one you are wearing," with a world of meaning in his voice, which she at once promptly waives aside.

"But 'beggars mustn't be choosers'; it is a well-known and unanswerable fact. I will give you this instead."

She hands him a rose as she speaks, perfect, it is true, both in hue and form, but certainly far removed from any suspicion of sentiment. The most infatuated lover could scarcely place a flower so full-blown next his heart for ever, or even wear it in his button-hole for an hour.

"It is a magnificent specimen," he observes, rather taken aback.

"Is it not?" she answers, and laughs.

Encouraged by this he advances nearer to her side, but as he moves forward she recedes, keeping the table between them.

"Berry, what welcome have you for me?" he asks, stretching out his hands imploringly.

"A hearty one, of course. I hope I have not been remiss," she returns briskly, and then, with an affectation of cordiality which galls him more than the most open slight, she adds, "It is so nice to meet old acquaintances again. It was only the other day Mr. Blythe turned up as unexpectedly as you."

"And you class me with him?" reproachfully.

"Yes; why not? I have known you quite as long! If you feel you do not deserve so much, praise my good nature, do not blame my judgment!"

He glances at her sharply. There is an undertone of earnest beneath the jest that makes him once more fancy he must have offended her.

"You are not vexed with me, Berry?" he questions, anxiously.

"I vexed with you? How could you think it? You were always so good to me! Don't you remember on board ship?"

But she breaks off suddenly. Strong as she thinks herself, she knows she dare not risk mentioning those days which were so sweet, and have left so sad a memory behind.

"I remember everything on board ship," he replies, gravely; "do you?"

"Of course!" hurriedly. "Mr. Blythe and I had a long talk together of all that happened then."

"All?"

"I think so! I could not be quite sure! Are you putting me through my catechism, Captain Carew?"

"I should like to do so!"

"You would find me very imperfect!"

"I would not care how halting your replies if only you would tell me truth!"

"Truth is an awkward thing, quite out of date!" she begins to quote, carelessly, but something in his manner makes her wait to hear what he will say.

"Hush!" he says, sternly. "Do not make me lose my respect as well as all love for you! Such trifling is unworthy both of you—and me!"

She hangs her head abashed, and likes him better for the rebuke than she has ever done before.

At the same time something she has once read flashes across her memory, and she almost repeats it aloud:—"Be not too hasty to admire or to trust the teachers of morality; they discourse like angels, but they live like men!"

"It is so easy to talk!" she remarks, pursuing her meditations. "I beg your pardon?" raising her eyebrows in surprise. "I mean," she explains, "that I have lost all faith in the reality of either truth or constancy!"

"Since when?"

It is on the tip of Berry's tongue to answer,— "Since I knew of your falseness," but she refrains. Instead she answers,—

"Since I have become a woman! I was a child when I knew you first!"

"Then I wish you had remained so!" with a sigh.

"Do you?" drily.

She holds a piece of heliotrope in her hand, apparently intent on deciding the relative merits of the two geraniums, one pink and one scarlet, that she places on each side.

"Pink is the prettier," she murmurs, thoughtfully; only meaning to provoke by her assumed indifference to his presence, and succeeding even beyond her desire.

"Miss Cardell, will you give a plain answer to my question. Do you wish to repudiate what you told me on board ship?"

"If it was anything that could have authorized you to speak to me as you are speaking now, I most certainly do," coolly.

He leans across the table to come as near to her as possible, striving to look into the eyes so obstinately bent on the ground.

"Berry, is it so strange a thing that I should interest myself in the sayings and doings of the woman I hoped to make my wife?" he asks, very gently.

She quivers in response. It is so sweet to hear herself called by that name by him, even although it can never really be. Lower and lower droops the head, and she almost reaches out her hand in answer to his appeal.

Seeing his advantage he pursues it.

"If you knew how I have lived upon this meeting—thought about it, dreamed about it—you would not be so cold, so unkind; you would not keep me in suspense."

Still no reply. She clasps her fingers round her throat as though choking, and in so doing loosens the purple velvet pansies that were fastened there.

They fall unheeded to the floor.

"Let me speak to Mrs. Chester," he goes on pleadingly, thinking not without reason that he is making way with her at last.

Women are so incomprehensible he reflects, so given to fits of shyness in and out of season. But his self-deception is not of long duration. The mention of one sister brings to mind the other—the sister that died for love of this man who stands before her, pleading his own cause as no doubt he pleaded it before with only too great success.

Her face hardens in a moment, and she flashes her big eyes angrily, as she answers hotly,—

"Not on the same subject, if you please. Surely it is enough that I should be insulted thus, and—and bored."

The speech is effectual at once. He falls backward as though stunned.

"Forgive me! I did not know that I was offending. You shall not complain of me again."

He draws himself up stiffly, and makes room for her to go through the door; and stricken almost unto death she passes out.

Once she has gone he relaxes, sinking into a chair and burying his face in his hands.

It is all over. He has put his fate to the test and lost all. Is it a sign of weakness or unmanliness that he stoops and picks the faded flowers from the ground, pressing them passionately to his lips?

Since ever the world was, women have had a power over the hearts of men that not even their own unworthiness could destroy; and John Carew is not the first, who, having given himself up to the thralldom of love, finds it difficult to free himself again.

Not all the falseness he suspects in her, nor the fickleness of which he has proved her guilty, can take away the subtle fragrance of the flower that for even so short a time has nestled in her breast.

And yet the one tear which is wrung from him in his pain might well-nigh have withered it, so full is it of concentrated bitterness and despair.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"I wonder what has happened to Jack that he is altered so?" muses Lady Blanche, thoughtfully that evening in Berry's room.

"Is he altered?"

"Terribly. He used to be so sunny always; but of course, you did not know him before."

"He has been rather silent to-day, but he seemed all right when he first came," says Berry, looking out a little nervously through the thick masses of nut-brown hair that are falling unconfined about her shoulders.

"Only at first, though. That same evening I noticed a change. I suspect he is in love!"

"What makes you fancy that?" asks a smothered voice from behind a big ivory brush.

"Because men who are usually unimpressible are always in such a far worse plight when they do happen to become victims to the tender passion. It is retribution I suppose."

"Perhaps," is the somewhat doleful assent.

"I would never forgive a girl who jilted a man like that," goes on Lady Blanche, with determination that almost amounts to fierceness in anyone of her equable temperament.

The girl who has been thus innocently animadverted upon blushes guiltily.

"He has been like a brother to me always, and I was an only child!"

"How thankful you ought to be!" is Berry's involuntary exclamation, as the thought occurs to her how it is her sisters, who, living and dead, have seemed to combine against her happiness. Was there no other man in the world that Margaret should love this one and die for him, leaving her to avenge the wrong? And if Eve thinks love better than all beside, could she not have made the rather trite discovery before it was too late? Catching Lady Blanche's look of surprise, she adds, quickly,—

"Don't you think it nicer, too? All the love comes to one by right, and all the money, which is better still!"

"I don't remember being overburdened with either!" confesses Lady Blanche.

"Is anyone ever burdened with a superabundance of anything good?" bitterly.

"I wish I could see you married, Berry."

"It is quite on the cards that you may. I seem to be rapidly approaching that no doubt enviable state."

"I meant happily married," corrects the other; "to such a man, for instance, as Captain Carew."

Berry gasps a little at this, but goes on brushing her hair vigorously.

"Of course, that is quite out of the question. I was only wishing it. You are engaged, and he is in love, I know! I want you to stay another week with me, and help to cheer him up."

"It is very good of you," answers the girl, feeling guilty again, this time of hypocrisy; knowing that Eve must even now have received the note in which she has begged to be recalled. All next day she awaits the answer to it; and, in the afternoon it comes in the practical form of a carriage to convey her back. The Syce has a note for her.

"Dear Berry," it runs, "Will you ask Lady Blanche to excuse you from staying longer with her now, and to forgive us for taking you away. We have friends dining to-night and Alex particularly wishes you to be present. With kindest love to Lady Blanche,

"Your affectionate sister,
"Eve."

It has evidently been written under surveillance or with the idea of somehow being seen. But Berry does not trouble about this, it is too great a relief to be free from the strain of weighing each word and act, lest her secret should become known. If her lover's near neighbourhood is prevented from being a pleasure to her, it must necessarily be a pain. It is positive torture to be with him and not confess the love which he has so ardently solicited. She escapes the further trial of bidding him farewell, as he is out when the letter comes.

(To be continued.)

AN OPEN LIFE.

Live an open life,
Hedge it not about
With a selfish outgrowth,
On a wall of doubt.
Little sins and follies
Piled up here and there,
Will, like coral insects,
Make a reef of care.

Never plot and plan,
As you go your way,
How by mere dissembling
You "can make it pay."
Though you make a shilling
More than you expect,
You will lose a fortune
With your self-respect.

Live an open life,
Look men in the eye,
Never doubt that honour
Pays well, "by and by."
Always be consistent
With the words you preach,
If you live a false life,
Better not to teach.

Weed your garden well,
Ere the noxious plant
Kill your fruit, my neighbour,
Bringing you to want.
Crush the dark suggestion
With the hand of scorn,
Then the evil action
Never will be born.

Live an open life,
Honesty your guide,
Then you may, my neighbour,
Go your way with pride.
Though the world may vex you
With its care and strife,
You will be all ready
For Heaven's open life.

M. A. K.

THE LILY AND THE ROSE.

—O—

CHAPTER XXIV.

GRETA hardly knew how she managed to get through the next four days. She missed Alice at every turn; for to her, at any rate, she could have spoken of her troubles, sure of sympathy, whereas she did not dare breathe Philip's name before her mother.

In every other way Lady Avanley was most considerate to the poor girl; and Greta almost wondered that she was, not knowing that she was trying to make atonement after a fashion for a great wrong done.

The first sign of anger she showed was when Lord Darminster left a splendid bouquet for Greta, and a message, saying he should call in the afternoon, about five, if the ladies were likely to be at home, and the girl threw down the flowers with a haughty gesture, saying,—

"As far as I am concerned, I shall not be at home—to Lord Darminster!"

"Greta! You should be careful what you say before Cox!" her mother complained, sharply; "you know how such people talk!"

"He may talk as much as he likes, mamma. I have no objection to anyone knowing that I hate Lord Darminster."

"We have heard that so often before we are getting rather tired of the repetition," was the frigid reply. "After all, is it worth while to hate anyone?"

"Perhaps not; but how can you help yourself? If I never saw him I should forget to dislike him, but he will come to the house."

"He knows I am always glad to see him."

"And he knows I am not!"

"But it so happens that I am mistress here."

"Undoubtedly; and I have no wish to dispute your authority, mamma. But I do think you might let me remain upstairs when you have visitors whom I dislike."

"Is it likely I should encourage you in such discourtesy? As the daughter of the house, you are bound to receive any guests I care to have!"

"Then it's a pity we don't sympathise a little better in our tastes," said Greta. "When your favoured guest is the greatest enemy I have in the world it is a little hard for me!"

"How is Lord Darminster your enemy?"

"He pesters me with attentions; he knows I abhor—"

"Hush!" Lady Avanley exclaimed, with a shocked air. "You have got into the habit of using such strong expressions lately. Don't you know that a real gentlewoman always restrains herself?" The Duchess of Downshire, who was a model for every lady, only said: "Really!" when they told her all her jewels had been stolen.

"Perhaps she didn't mind."

"She said afterwards she cried like a baby when she was alone; but she had such commendable self-control she could hide all this from us, and go on with her game as if nothing had happened. I had great hopes of you at one time, Greta; but since Alice Marchmont came to the house you have sadly deteriorated."

"Socially speaking, I suppose you mean; morally, I have improved, mamma, since I have ceased to be a hypocrite."

"At any rate, you were far happier then than you are now!"

"We were not intimate with Lord Darminster just at first. It is his continual presence that takes away all my happiness."

"I am glad to hear that is all!" Lady Avanley answered, primly, as she left the room.

When Lord Darminster entered he looked about him keenly, and seeing no sign of his flowers his face darkened, and he said in a low voice to Greta,—

"My poor bouquet failed to find favour in your sight it seemed; and yet, so anxious was I it should be worthy of the fair recipient, I sent my valet up to Covent Garden by the early train this morning."

"I am sorry you should have had all that trouble, Lord Darminster," she answered, coldly; "but I don't really care for roses when they are out of season—they have no smell!"

"What do you care for, then?"

And he bent eagerly forward to catch her answer.

"For nothing that you can give me!" She felt cruel, wickedly heartless as she said this; but still it was right to remind him again and again that his cause was hopeless. Lady Avanley propped up his courage with false hopes, but he had always heard the truth from her, and could not even accuse her of coquetry.

He turned white to his very lips, and for a moment he looked at her silently, as if he were too overcome to answer. Then he roused himself to say, in a low voice,—

"Perhaps some day I may have something to give you you would value more than your life."

"What is that?"

"You will see for yourself, later."

She smiled disdainfully.

"I would not accept my life, even as a gift, from you, Lord Darminster; because I know quite well that you are incapable of disinterested kindness, and would make your own conditions."

"Naturally; so would you under similar circumstances!"

"The only condition I should make would be, that you went away from Darminster for good."

"You are very complimentary, Greta!"

"Compliments between us would be absurd."

"I should prefer them infinitely to unpleasant truths."

She half turned from him with an impatient movement.

"You know my feelings towards you perfectly well, Lord Darminster, for I have attempted no disguise. If you will come all the same you must make up your mind to these unpleasant truths, for I cannot deceive any one!"

"Except Lady Avahley!"

"I don't understand what you mean," she answered, haughtily; but the quick flush mounted into her white face, staining it rosy red.

"I have something in my smoking-room at the Castle under a glass shade which I value beyond everything I possess. Can you guess what it is?"

She shrugged her shoulders disdainfully.

"It is a pocket-handkerchief with an embroidered monogram in one corner, which I found under the—"

"Hush!" she cried out, sharply. "You are not justified in accusing me, since you did not see me drop the handkerchief!"

Lord Darminster laughed then.

"I have more proof of that and other things than I require."

"I wonder you care to hold any communication with such a disreputable person, my lord," she said, with sovereign hauteur.

"Frankly speaking, so do I; but I suppose we all make fools of ourselves once in our lives. Besides, I like to conquer."

"So you have told me before; but it doesn't seem to me you are any nearer conquering than you were at the beginning."

"You say that because you do not understand. I am quite satisfied with my progress."

"You are very easily satisfied."

"No man less easily, I assure you. Nothing but substantial results content me."

"And where are these substantial results?"

"My rival is in prison, for one thing," he said, orally.

"Where all my sympathy follows him," she retorted, defiantly.

"I have nothing to say against that, since you must stop there."

"Not necessarily!"

And she looked him full in the face, with an expression of cool daring that made him feel for the moment as if he should like to kill her.

All along, in his jealous passion, it had seemed to him easier to part with her than to let her fall into Philip's hands—Philip whom he hated as men of his nature do hate.

"What could you do more?" he asked, after a short silence.

"Act!"

"For the life of me I can't think of anything you could do; unless you have a young lady's notions of throwing herself at the feet of the judge, and imploring him to let Mr. Philip Granville off. Forgery is a serious thing!"

"Philip Granville never committed forgery!"

"No! Then who did?"

"That remains to be proved."

"I fancy, myself, the only proof forthcoming will be the proof of his guilt," answered Lord Darminster, in a tone of decision that sent a thrill of fear through Greta's whole body, although she would not have let him see this for the world. "I saw General Melthorpe this morning, and he seems to think there is not the smallest chance of Philip Granville's acquittal."

"He wanted to please you."

"How should he know that this would please me? I am thankful to say no one suspects you of any sympathy with a forger, or me of any cause for jealousy—as far as Philip Granville is concerned. The announcement of our engagement would have stopped a rumour of this sort, in any case."

"Our engagement! What do you mean?"

"Mine and yours," he answered, coldly.

"Lord Darminster, this is unwarrantable!"

"Not exactly," he interrupted, with a coolly aggravating smile; "because you accepted me at first, you know."

"I won't discuss this question with you again, it is not worth the trouble," she said, haughtily, and turned her back on him to speak to Sir Charles, who had just entered.

The young baronet looked pale and troubled, and Greta, who really cared for him in a sisterly fashion, and was not afraid of him now, held out her hand to him, saying kindly,—

"I can see you are worried to death, like me, Charles! Come to the other end of the room—I want to speak to you."

Lord Darminster watched them move away, and longed to follow, being keenly curious as to what Greta had to say to her cousin. But she took care to be out of hearing before she observed,—

"Do you know what has become of Alice? I was dreadfully shocked and grieved to find her gone when I returned from Mrs. Melthorpe's."

"I am afraid it was my fault, Greta. She went to avoid me."

"Not at all. She went because mamma turned her out."

"Impossible!" exclaimed the young man, distressfully.

"Mamma told me so herself. She had heard absurd reports which I could have explained away if I had been here, and she told her to look out for another home. Alice was proud and independent, and naturally indignant at the charges made against her, and she went at once—Heaven knows where!"

"If I had thought this I would have tried at once to trace her," Sir Charles resumed; "but I fancied she intended to avoid me, and, therefore, it would be a useless impertinence to try and discover her whereabouts."

"Why should she wish to avoid you, Charles? I fancied you were such good friends!"

"I hoped we were—but—but—it is a long story, Greta, and I cannot speak plainly as yet; but she fancied, with some reason, that she had cause to suspect me—"

Greta looked him straight in the eyes, after a disconcerting way she had—in common with Alice.

"You are an honourable gentleman, Charles. You never tried to deceive her?"

"Never, as I hope to be saved!"

"But she thought so, poor girl!"

"I am sorry to say she did!"

"Then she has that trouble as well as the other," returned Greta, her eyes filling with sympathetic tears. "I do wish we could find her, Charles. I know she has very little money, and what is to become of her when that is gone?"

"Don't!" he said, shrinking, as if she were probing a cruel wound. "I can't bear to think of this. But if you give me permission to search her out for you, Greta, I will never rest until I obtain some information."

"I give you full permission," she replied.

"I love her as if she were my own sister, and I feel it hard we should be parted just now when she would be such a help and comfort to me!"

"If I bring her back it shall be as the mistress of Aylesford Hall," he said, setting his teeth. "She shall never be at your mother's mercy again."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Greta, fervently; "but the thing is to find her."

"I hoped she would have written to you."

"So did I; but Alice has a very high sense of honour, and I am afraid she would not think she ought to correspond with me as my mother objected to our intimacy. Very wrongly," Greta made haste to add, "for Alice is a thousand times better than I am, and never gave me anything but good advice."

"Poor child! it seems as if her troubles are never to end!" he said, wistfully. "I did hope she would have stayed here until my home was ready for her; and now she is thrown upon the world again!"

"Never mind, we must find her," Greta returned, trying to speak cheerfully; "and when

once she is found she must never leave us again."

"I'll take care about that!" was the emphatic reply. "I have had no pleasure in my life since she went away!"

"Poor fellow!" she said, frankly and sweetly. "Do you know I have had a very high opinion of you ever, since I found you were in love with Alice?"

"Thank you," he answered, smiling sadly; "but you would have had a higher one still, I expect, if I had not allowed her to go away."

"You couldn't help yourself. I am sure."

"No, it was all so sudden. I saw her one day, and she said nothing about leaving, although she was gone before night."

"She was too proud to stay where she was not welcome."

"She was right there; but she might have told me of her plans."

"Did she accept you, then?"

"No," answered Sir Charles, hesitatingly.

"She never refused you!" exclaimed Greta, who fancied she knew that Alice cared for the young baronet.

"Yes, she did; but for a certain reason—only—but when everything is explained, I believe she will reverse her decision."

"She shall," Greta said, with something of her old imperiousness and pretty petulance.

"I will make her."

"I don't think I should care to owe my happiness even to you, Greta. If she does not say Yes from her heart I would rather she kept to her first No."

"I would not ask her to say Yes unless it came from her heart, Charles, even if you were the best match in England!"

Sir Charles turned and stared at her.

"Why," he said, "haven't you changed your opinion considerably since I saw you last?"

"No," she replied; "but I have learned to tell the truth!"

"How is that?"

A wonderful smile broke over her white face.

"Can't you guess?" she whispered. "I Love has routed conventionalities; and I dare be true to myself."

"I am glad of it, Greta. I often thought you were playing a part."

"And a miserable part too. Now, in spite of all my troubles, I feel happier than I felt before."

"I am sure you would. I know by the saddest experience how much deception costs one!"

"I am certain you never hid anything in your life!" she exclaimed. "You are the frankest person I know."

"I have no secrets of my own; certainly," he said; "but if you have other people's, it comes to the same thing."

"I don't know; it seems to me other people's secrets must be easier to keep than one's own!"

"Don't try the experiment," he answered, feelingly. "Supposing all your happiness depended upon your speaking out?"

"Then I am afraid I should speak out."

"If the secret were your own; but if it were another person's honour would keep you silent!"

"Of course."

"Then take my advice—have nothing to do with other people's secrets, lest they should cost you the happiness of your life," he returned; and pressing her hand affectionately, he slipped out whilst Lady Avahley's back was turned, having such a feeling against her by this time, that he could not bear even to bid her good-bye.

Greta had been enduring tortures of suspense all day, though she had kept such a brave face; but as soon as it became dark she stole out of the drawing-room, intending to run over to Aylesford Rectory to see if Mr. Granville had returned from town. She found the front door fastened and the key taken out, and when she questioned Cox, with assumed carelessness, he replied,—

"My lady said I was to lock up all the doors

me'am, at dusk every night for the present, as we've seen a queer-looking man hanging about for some time. You didn't want to go out, me'am?"

Of course Grota was obliged to say no, and returned to the drawing-room, where Lady Avonley still sat behind the *Times*, smiling significantly to herself, and thinking how fortunate it was, she understood her daughter so well.

CHAPTER XXV.

OWN by one Alice parted with her ornaments, missing nothing but a ring which had been her father's last gift, and a locket which contained her mother's hair. She had pawned most of the things, hoping one day to be able to redeem them, and because she could not bear the feeling that she was parting from them altogether.

All this while no letter had come from Miss Middleton, and though she tried hard to be brave, Alice's heart began to fail her. After all her weary journey she was no nearer finding employment than she had been at first. At last she was getting so low that, when the grocer at the corner—a friend of Mrs. Faith's—offered her the situation of daily governess in his family, she was obliged to accept it.

There were three red-headed daughters, the oldest seventeen, all insufferably vulgar and pretentious; but luckily, as Alice in her ignorance was disposed to think, there was no mother to interfere. The grocer himself only made two stipulations—that they should learn the "pianer and arithmetic," the rest he left to Alice's discretion.

It would have been difficult to conceive more uncongenial work for a girl of her refinement; for it was impossible to feel any interest in the Misses Lawrence or their studies; but Mrs. Faith told her she ought to be thankful to get an engagement at all, having no recommendations to give; and Alice saw she must put her pride in her pocket or starve.

For some time things went tolerably well. The Misses Lawrence were afraid of their governess—whom they knew in their hearts to be very different to themselves—and were decently well-behaved.

But by degrees the awe with which she had at first inspired them began to wear off, and then Alice's torture began. She was so worn out at night she could not even read, and simply sat staring into the fire until bedtime came, when, happily for her reason, she could sleep and forget.

"Heaven has forsaken me altogether. I must be very wicked," she often said to herself. "No one could be punished like this unless she had done something very wrong."

So she told herself, never dreaming that worse was yet to come. Mr. Lawrence had hitherto been busy in his shop, and she had only caught an occasional glimpse of him, as he came and went. But now he began to make opportunities of seeing her, and would even come into the room where they were studying and sit down beside her, to the intense disgust of his daughters—who had reasons of their own for supposing the father admired the governess, and never for one instant pictured her as declining the honour of his alliance.

Alice was slow to understand his meaning—it seemed so impossible he could think of her in that light; but one Sunday afternoon, when she was trying to rest her aching head on the stuffy horsehair couch, who should present himself but Mr. Lawrence.

The consciousness of a new suit of clothes from a West-end tailor gave him confidence, and he advanced smiling into the room, with a huge bunch of all-coloured chrysanthemums in his hand.

"I've brought you a bouquet, miss," he said; "and as my girls are gone to the Park, I thought I'd come in for a chat. I'm a sociable sort of chap—as I daresay you've found out by this time—and I ain't going to stop at home count-

ing the clock a-ticking and a-ticking when I know where good company's to be found."

Vulgar as he was he had been liberal to her, and as Alice did not suspect his motives she thanked him graciously for the flowers, and rose to arrange them.

"Bless me! You do look bad!" exclaimed Mr. Lawrence, edging a little closer. "I should say teaching didn't agree with you."

"I am not accustomed to London," she answered, evasively.

"I don't believe it's that so much as the worry of hammering learning into my girls' heads," he said; "and I've come to make a proposal that will suit me if it enters into your views."

Even then Alice never guessed what was coming, and went on arranging her flowers without looking up. Her silence encouraged him, and he added, with a grin,—

"I say, you come to the shop as mistress, my dear, and all the work you shall have shall be to keep the accounts and look after the mill. Does that suit you now?"

To his utter surprise Alice turned upon him indignantly, and asked how he dared take such a liberty.

"A liberty!" blushed Mr. Lawrence, "when you haven't got a furthering to bless yourself with, and I am putting by something comfortable every year!"

"People like you think money is everything," she said, scornfully. "I daresay it will surprise you to hear that I would rather marry the poorest gentleman that ever lived than share the largest fortune with anyone below me."

"Yes, it does surprise me how anyone can be such a fool," he retorted, roughly. "You are very little better than a snivel snuff."

"Perhaps not; but at any rate I am able to give warning, which if I were your wife I could not do."

"I shouldn't think you'd want to when you had plenty to eat and drink, and a good roof over your head."

Her indignant young eyes made him cower as they fastened on his face.

"I daresay you think these everything; but let me tell you, I have wants you could not understand or satisfy."

"Of course, if you took it into your head to fret for sparrowgrass at Christmas-time I mightn't be able to please you; but I don't see why a girl who has had to get her living anyhow, as you may say, should be so mighty particular."

"I am surprised that you should think work any disgrace."

"It's no disgrace to you, if you are not above it. I am not ashamed of my shop."

"Why should you be? I expect it was the height of your ambition when you first started."

"And what more respectable and proper?"

"For you."

"Well! I ain't troubling about anyone else. If I'd been a lord's son I might have looked higher, but my father was a buttermilk in the City, and I don't want to pretend to be better than I am. If you don't like me you can leave me, miss. I know plenty who'd give a good deal to be in your shoes."

"I should be sorry to stand in their way," was the haughty reply.

"Well!" he said, rising; "I see you and me are not likely to fit it off, miss, and I'd rather you didn't come our way any more. I paid you up square last night, and there's your week's wages instead of a week's warning!"—throwing the money down on the table. "I'll take my attentions, next time, where I know they will be welcome."

So saying, he marched out majestically, and Alice was left to her reflections. She was glad to be rid of him on any terms now she knew what his intentions were, but it became an anxious question how she was to live.

At the very thought of resuming her old miserable search for employment Alice's courage failed her utterly. She was not so strong, as she had been at first, nor so brave, perhaps, for she felt as if she would rather

creep away somewhere to die than begin the struggle over again.

"But I will try and not think to-night," she said to herself, wearily, as she gathered up the flowers and thrust them into the grate. "To-morrow I must face the situation, but to-night I may rest—and perhaps the strength I need will come to me."

She threw herself down on the couch again, and had just sunk into a doze—which was more like stupor than sleep—when the door opened roughly, and Mrs. Faith came into the room, her visage very much inflamed, like a person's who had been drinking.

"So you've behaved badly to Mr. Lawrence," she said, placing herself in front of Alice, who raised herself on her elbow and stared at her in a stupefied way. "You'll come to the workhouse—that will be the end of you—as you don't seem to know which side your head's buttered!"

"I would rather it weren't buttered at all than by Mr. Lawrence," the girl roused herself to say.

"Oh! well, if you are going to fly in the face of Providence in that fashion, and give yourself such high and mighty airs, you may go elsewhere," said Mrs. Faith; "for I know very well I shall have to whistle for my rent. So be pleased to take a week's warning from to-morrow, and if you like to go sooner, all the better!"

So saying, she walked out, slamming the door after her with such violence poor Alice could hardly suppress a scream. She had been very far from comfortable at Mrs. Faith's, and had felt all along that the woman was taking advantage of her in every possible way; and yet she could not bear the thought that at the end of a few days she would be homeless. Her money would be all gone by that time, and she could not pay in advance to ensure a good reception from her new landlady—and the question was whether anyone would care to take her in under these circumstances.

The poor little maid-of-all-work brought in the tea at this moment, and Alice made herself a cup, but not a mouthful could she eat; and then, being actually ill by this time, she crept up to bed, and lay watching the stars through the skylight and trying to picture the dear face in Heaven she loved so well.

She hoped that by the morning her head would have ceased to ache, and she should feel better and brighter; but when she tried to raise it from the pillow it was like a lump of lead; and she sank back again with a groan of despair. There she must lie, at any rate, for the morning; and it was clear that Mrs. Faith did not trouble over her disappearance, for she did not even send the girl to ask how she was.

At about one o'clock Alice tottered down stairs shivering, to find a fireless grate; and when she rang to have the fire lighted the maid, taking her tone from the mistress, answered insolently that she ought to have come down at the proper time—she couldn't do her work twice over.

But even as she spoke Alice's white face and heavy eyes touched her evidently, for she muttered something about being tired to death, and shuffled out to return presently with a sifter of live coals and some sticks. As soon as there was even a faint blaze Alice drew nearer, cowering beside into it for warmth. She longed to ask for a cup of hot coffee, but had not the courage; and it did not seem to strike Mary Ann that she must certainly need something—or if it did strike her she did not care to make the suggestion.

She sat there passive and inert for hours, too exhausted to make any effort; but at last, fortunately, Mary Ann condescended to bring her some tea, and refreshed by this, Alice managed to break her twenty-four hours' fast. For three days she remained in this state of mental and bodily collapse, and then she recovered sufficiently to go out and look for lodgings.

She was weak and giddy, and had to stop every now and then and cling to the railings for support, her heart beat so suffocatingly, but



[MR. LAWRENCE MEETS WITH AN UNLOOKED FOR REBUTT.]

fortune favoured her on this occasion, for the third house she went to, where a card was in the window, a respectable, motherly-looking old widow came to the door, and, in answer to Alice's inquiries, said she had only one room to let, but that was so large and commodious, she felt sure the young lady could make it into a bed-room and sitting-room combined if she chose. Her face and manner were so kind, the rent so reasonable, Alice closed thankfully with this offer, and went back to Mrs. Faith's presently much cheered by the success of her expedition.

She did not see Mrs. Faith again; and Alice could not help thinking she regretted the step she had taken, but was too proud to say so, for she had no other lodgers and would certainly miss the weekly rent of Alice's miserable rooms, and the exorbitant extras.

These last were so large the last week, Alice had a very few shillings only in her purse when she entered her new home, where she found everything so bright and cosy and homelike, she felt cheered in spite of herself.

Mrs. Knox had a mutton chop waiting for her, so daintily prepared, Alice ate of it hungrily.

"Just as if she had been starved, poor dear!" the kind woman said later when she was describing the girl's trials and hardships. "And she's so thin it made my heart ache to see her."

Alice felt almost herself again that night; and as the improvement continued, in the morning she went out to look for employment again, and also to notify her change of address at the Post-office, in case Miss Middleton's long-delayed letter should at last arrive.

A good tea was waiting for her when she got home, but somehow the girl's head was aching again miserably, and she could not do justice to it, greatly to Mrs. Knox's distress.

"I can see what's the matter with you, miss," the good woman said; "you've got a cold coming. You go straight to bed, and I'll bring you a treacle-posset, nice and hot."

"You are very kind," the girl said, wistfully; "but I can't bear to give you so much trouble."

"Trouble—nonsense, miss!" she answered, quite gruffly. Then added, with peculiar gentleness: "I had a daughter of my own once, and she would have been about your age, miss, if she'd been alive. Don't talk about it, I can't bear it; but you'll understand why I feel as if it's a great pleasure to be doing anything for you."

"I believe you would have done it, anyhow," answered Alice, gratefully.

"Well! perhaps I should," answered Mrs. Knox, smiling through the tears that had gathered in her dim, old eyes. "You have such a bonny face, my dear."

If it were a pleasure to Mrs. Knox to wait upon Alice, she had plenty of it in the days to come. The little back room at Mrs. Faith's had not been very healthy, and the girl had taken a sort of low fever, which prostrated her so completely she could hardly lift her arm at last, and lay, as Mrs. Knox said, like a newborn babe—only she was more patient and prettier.

The doctor shook his head sometimes; she was so near the border-land, it seemed as if she must slip out of their hands; but Mrs. Knox would coax her gently back, and she would rally again. And so it went on day after day; but thanks to youth and a good constitution, she at last shook the fever off, and lay very weak and spent, but safe on this side of the golden gates.

One evening Alice had been lying very quiet for some time, and Mrs. Knox evidently thought that she was asleep, for when the doctor came she met him at the door, and evidently motioned him to silence, for he advanced on tiptoe to the side of the bed.

Alice was just in that state when it is difficult to rouse yourself, and yet she was conscious of all that went on, and she distinctly heard Dr. Warman say, in a cautious whisper,—

"Has the poor girl no friends? You ought not to take all this upon yourself, Mrs. Knox."

The answer came clear and decided.

"I had a daughter of my own once, sir, and she might have needed help even as this poor young lady needs it. I will do all I can, and I have no doubt she will pay me back later on."

These noble words made a distinct impression on Alice's mind, and she carried them off with her into the heart of her sleep. Should she let this good woman suffer for her poor pride? Never! she told herself, any personal humiliation were better; and so she resolved that if her hand could hold a pen, she would take a step on the morrow, which she had prayed hard to be spared, but which she recognised now as the only course to pursue.

(To be continued.)

He who increases the endearment of life increases at the same time the terrors of death.

CARPETS.—An acceptable carpet should have a general "all over" effect, without any great accentuation of particular parts. The Indian and Persian carpets meet this requirement. While a carpet should present a general appearance of evenness, parts may yet be slightly "pronounced," or emphasized, so as to give to the mind the idea of centres from which the pattern radiates. A carpet should, in some respects, resemble a bank richly covered with flowers; thus, when seen from a distance the effect should be that of a general "bloom" of colour. When viewed from a nearer point it should present certain features of somewhat special interest; and when looked at closely new beauties should make their appearance. As a floor is a flat surface, no ornamental covering placed on it should make it appear otherwise. A carpet having to serve as a background to furniture should be of a somewhat neutral character. Every carpet, however small, should have a border, which is as necessary to it as a frame is to a picture.



[A HAPPY ACCIDENT.]

NOVELETTE.]

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTERS.

CHAPTER I.

A WOODEN.

THE village children fled like frightened sheep as the Reverend Randolph Cleve passed through the lane at the back of his house, for his severe countenance overawed his parishioners wherever it was seen.

A tall man, upright, with his head carried stiffly back as he walked, an eagle cast of feature, high narrow forehead, and long, hooked nose, shading a pair of sunken, small dark eyes, quick and bright as a ferret's.

He was well-looking, and a gentleman, however, despite his uncongeniality of manner; and perhaps that was the reason that many of his lady friends still aspired to become the second Mrs. Cleve.

He did not look much of a subject for the tender passion to-day as he marched along, lost in meditation, his face, harder than ever, locked in its cold calculation.

Mr. Cleve became presently aware that he was not the only person in the lane that was shadowy and cool beneath its trees, and had many a pleasant hedge gap and devious little turning. He paused and surveyed two people sitting on the moss just where the rivulet sang the loudest.

He recognised a soft, slouching clerical hat as a belonging of his curate's, and a little brown mushroom as a well-worn head gear of his favourite daughter Margaret.

The said curate, Mr. Horace Dacre, was not a favourite with the vicar, and the latter had no sympathy for romantic souls, and often wondered how it was that he himself had ever been led into matrimony.

First he gazed at the whispering pair before him in anger and indignation, then he stepped

a few paces nearer, and coughed loudly, as if he were preparing to preach a sermon.

Margaret started, and turned round a lovely, blushing rose-bud of a face upon her father. The Reverend Horace dropped the hand he had just permitted himself to clasp, and stood up, ready to meet an army, but he flushed violently when he perceived the figure of the vicar advancing on the noiseless sward, the last person he desired to see.

"Mr. Dacre here! Why are you not at Seacombe to-day?"

"I am going now. I met Miss Margaret a few minutes ago, and waited to—to—speak to her."

"Margaret, you have been over long on the message your sister sent you! Hasten home!"

Margaret made an awkward little inclination to Mr. Dacre, and, pulling her shabby hat lower over her face, went without a word. The green boughs hid her retreating form from the two men, whose eyes involuntarily met as they looked after her.

"Mr. Dacre, I must beg you will remember that my daughters have been brought up without a mother's care, and have lived entirely out of the world. They are totally unused to flattery and the ways of youths fresh from college. I choose that they shall remain so, and, therefore, must ask you to refrain from desultory—ahem—conversation with them whilst you are amongst us."

The vicar spoke in his most arbitrary tone, which was harsh enough to chill the budding of the strongest hope in the human breast; but Horace Dacre only smiled slightly as he pushed his hair back with rather nervous fingers. He had bonnie brown curls that would wreath their soft spires about his temples persistently, though Mr. Cleve had hinted several times that the adornment did not become the profession.

"I am sorry, sir, that you confound me with the generality of youths fresh from college. I

—I have never flattered Miss Cleve—I mean Miss Margaret; in fact, I could not flatter her. She is the loveliest girl I have ever seen, and I—well, I think I love her about as much as anyone ever will do in this world."

"Sir!" ejaculated the vicar; but the Reverend Horace stood his ground valiantly.

"I have not told her so yet," he continued, quietly and distinctly, "because I intended to bespeak your kindness first, and I wanted to have a fairer prospect than I have at present before me to offer her."

"Sir, pray do not continue this conversation; it is disagreeable to me, and will become so to you if you persevere."

"But, Mr. Cleve—"

"No more of this nonsense; the girl is a child still, and when the time arrives for her to marry I would select a different sort of husband for her. Mr. Dacre, you are a young man of a new and bad school. You are without reverence. You follow your sacred calling as if it had no claim upon your behaviour. Your heart is not in your work."

Horace coloured, and cast his eyes down for a moment.

"Perhaps you are right," he said, frankly; "but I have tried honestly and earnestly to do my duty. I would have made an effort to change my future if—I had not met your family, and I have remained on because I feared to blight my life too soon, and lose all hope."

The vicar looked at him with a deeper displeasure; but he went on.

"I have only one friend in the world, who has been like a father to me. He is a distant cousin, but he educated me when my parents died, and took me to live with him as if I were his son. It was his will that I should enter the Church. I consented unthinkingly; but, much as I respect his goodness, the choice of a profession should have been my own, and I have regretted my ordination for some time

past; but I was going to throw myself upon Mr. Frere's pity, and—and—"

"What were you going to do?"

"To go abroad as a civilian, and when I had obtained some sufficiently remunerative situation I meant to ask you to let me win Margaret."

"Sir!" interrupted Mr. Cleve, fiercely, "do not allude to my daughter so familiarly. I utterly disapprove of you and your aspirations. I forbid you ever speaking to Miss Margaret Cleve except in the presence of others, and entirely discountenance your suit. Regret your ordination! Leave the Church as soon as you can do so! That is my last counsel to you on the subject also. Never attempt to renew this conversation with me."

The vicar strode away when he had delivered the final word of his angry address, and his curate was left to some unpleasant reflections. He picked up the hat he had tossed to his feet in his excitement, rubbed his early hair violently, drew a long breath, and then laughed softly to himself.

"The course of true love again," he said; "but, never mind, I'll be a hummingbird longer. I'll sell my place to a fitter and better man, and go to work in my own way—namely, and then I'll claim Margaret of herself. If she is what I believe her to be, she will be faithful and true, for she must know that I love her. I'll tell her plainly before I go; but she shall be bound by no promise. I did not think I ever should dislike any respectable head of a family so heartily as I do the vicar. I've never under the circumstances, I'm not a good Christian."

Nevertheless, the Reverend Horace betook himself to Seacombe, and ministered to the wants of a rough and unimpassioned set of parishioners with an excellent temper and much kindness.

He had a pleasant greeting for the poor folks who were ill and in trouble, and true sympathy with suffering in any shape flowed easily from his generous heart, and when he returned homewards in the summer dusk that evening he did not feel that he had wasted his time; but he was very thoughtful, for he felt that a crisis in his life had come, and there were some dark and heavy clouds overhanging his future.

What lay behind them? How should he break the news of his purposed secession from the ministry to his dear old friend and second father, Mr. Frere? The mere idea of giving the gentle-minded old man pain was a pang in itself.

"But it has to be done!" said the curate to himself, as he absently stopped to lean over a gate after toiling up a very steep hill. There were fields rich with wheat and barley, rippling in the soft breeze, and the sweet air brought the perfume of hay and ripening fruit towards him graciously.

Close by, the tiled chimneys of the old vicarage rose against the hill-side, and he saw the trees of the long garden appertaining to the house just catching the dark from the sky, and the birds were singing very low in their branches. It was a dreamy hour, full of peace, but Horace Dacre was restless and unhappy, like a prisoner in chains.

Suddenly there was a grating sound in the road, the middle of which was baked hard by the sun, and a scorching east wind that had had its mischievous way a few days ago. The curate turned in time to see a bicycle overturned and its unlucky rider pitched head foremost into a ditch.

In a moment Horace was on the scene of the catastrophe just as a second bicyclist, bowled round a fateful curve in the road, nearly meeting with the same accident as his companion, who was ruefully examining his ankle and wrist.

"Hallo, Fellowes! You were going at a pace. I knew you would come to grief!" shouted the second traveller.

"Now, shut up! Don't be hard on the unfortunate! I'm nearly killed!"

"Is he really hurt much? Why, it's Dacre!"

Horace, I was never so glad in my life! I'd lost sight of you."

"Stanford in England again!" exclaimed the curate.

The young men shook hands cordially, but had to turn their attention to Fellowes, whose plight was certainly very uncomfortable. He was rating the bicycle and the road and the journey in a low-voiced grumble that would have been amusing if he had not been really an object of commiseration.

"Look here, you two gentlemen," said he; "I can't walk a step. Help me if you can, but I'm heavy. My pilgrimage has been for some time. Is there a house near where they would admit me? Where is that smelly coming from?"

"The vicarage," answered Horace, quickly; "but I'm afraid they would not take you in. There is no lady there—at least there was some time, but they are unaccommodating to strangers, I mean."

Mr. Stanford looked quizzically at his friend.

"Is there any other house (close by)?" he asked.

"Not very near. There is the village inn, and you can have a room in the farm house where I am lodged at present. You must put up somewhere to-night. You will want a doctor."

"There's a lady coming this way," exclaimed Fellowes, making an heroic effort to scramble to his feet, and sinking down again.

The others glanced round in time to see the fitting figure of a girl, who made a halt pause, and then went on very fast indeed.

"We have frightened her!" groaned Fellowes, "and I thought she might have known where I could be taken. Dears me! Are all the women so kind here? She must have seen that there was something amiss with us."

"It was one of our vicar's daughters," explained Dacre, as he assisted Fellowes to a bank of soft grass. "If you two will stay here I shall bring you help in a few moments," and he went off towards the village at a flying pace, easily overtaking the girl before she reached the gate in the vicarage garden.

She turned, and he and Margaret were once more alone together; she, shy and constrained, he suddenly urged into impetuosity; he had but one moment, for there were footsteps approaching.

"Margaret!" said he; "if I go away for a long time—for a very long time, will you think about me sometimes?"

"She looked at him for an instant, and he saw something in her eyes that elated him, but she did not answer.

"Love of my heart. I bind you by no promise, but I love you dearly! Do not forget me!"

"There is Anne," said Margaret at last, speaking under her breath, and snatching her hand from him.

Anne Cleve came forward to them with the quiet stately grace that was natural to her.

"Father is calling for you to read to him, Margaret," she said in a sweet tone; "make haste in, dear!"

"Why couldn't you have read to him to-night?" murmured Margaret. "You generally do!"

"Only because he preferred you!"

Margaret went in slowly, she was not inclined to meet Mr. Cleve so soon; it would have been so much better to wait until they were all assembled.

Meanwhile Horace had explained his difficulty to Miss Cleve; how was aid to be obtained without delay in this sleepy village? There never was such a place as Culverdale.

"I will bring someone at once," she answered, promptly; "but I must tell my father. He will like to come!"

It ended in the vicar's appearance on the spot, and an unwillingly given invitation from him to the injured man and his travelling companion.

When Horace Dacre went back to his lonely lodging he had had a vision of the vicarage parlour alight with hospitality, the

strangers in the midst of the family group; and Margaret, all animation and merriment, as she listened to their tales of the road. Anne and Michal, listening too, but in silence.

CHAPTER II.

A FAMILY PARTY.

The sitting-room at the vicarage had seen many days of hard service, but it was homelike and quaint, with its good old-fashioned furniture, its comfortable corners and window nooks, though the flowering creepers and thickly-leaved vine made the windows rather dark in summer. This evening the air seemed sweeter than any other air to the two jaded Londoners, who were the recipients of the vicar's unwilling hospitality; and the strange solitude of the country that lay upon the fair landscape without seemed to cool the heated blood, like the touch of a peacemaker's hand.

Mr. Robert Fellowes, a clever and rising barrister, felt so unlike himself to-night that he was astonished, as he lay back on a sofa, and was waited on by the old servant, and the three young ladies of the vicarage. It was no matter that Mr. Cleve persistently stayed to play propriety, and was more than a little bit stiff as a host.

Guy Stanford stood at one of the open windows with folded arms, observantly regarding the household group. He was a literary man, somewhat tired by a London season and hard-brain-work, therefore the present atmosphere seemed in its sweet stillness to heal him.

Neither of the men regretted the accident that had brought them within such influences; to one the place seemed a poem, to the other a piece of truth and nature in a foolish world, and they were both charmed.

The three girls were full of eager and innocent questions, Anne only seeming to be reserved, but her reserve was scarcely noticeable amidst her sisters' gay chatter.

Margaret was the merriest; she was very pretty, with small mobile features, and a quantity of light, shining curls; but Michal, with her red tresses glittering in the rays of the lamp, oftenest caught the glance of Mr. Stanford dwelling upon her; for she was a veritable wild rose. With her delicately glowing complexion, and perfect colouring, with such lovely deep-blue eyes, such exquisite features, who would find fault with the forbidden line of her luxuriant hair. Guy had cherished an aversion to red hair all his life, but forgot his dislike as he looked at Michal.

Then, Anne, with her elder sister's gravity, her gentle face and clear, honest blue eyes, was a great change from the fashionably-bred, rather forced young ladies that these two gentlemen had been accustomed to meet in society. Something in her voice and manner strongly attracted Robert Fellowes. She seemed unique in her sweetness.

Mr. Cleve's presence was a continual restraint on the conversation; for he sat up very straight, and solemnly discussed the London preachers, the statistics of crime, and the desirability of converting the natives; and would be betrayed into no other interests. He was determined to overawe his guests, and to keep his daughters out of the conversation as much as possible.

"Now, papa!" said Margaret, with something like a pout; "you have made me read columns and columns of dullness this afternoon, and I want to be told all about London; it isn't a big city, with hoards of the 'unconverted' inside it, surely?"

"Margaret!"

Mr. Cleve's voice was harsh, and his flip-pant daughter, blushing crimson, was silenced in a moment. She took out her sewing, and became very diligent.

"We are curious, you know," said Michal, "because we have never been out of this place. We have never seen anyone except our neighbours since we were born, and I feel quite old

now. I'm nineteen—fancy living all one's life in the country!"

"You are certainly none the worse for your want of experience," observed Guy Stanford, smiling.

"I agree with you, sir," said Mr. Clave, pompously; "I have desired to keep my children apart from the world; they are better here than if they had grown up in idleness and luxury."

But it was evident that these girls were afraid of their father; their gaiety only came fitfully, and their innocent curiosity was constantly checked. The visitors were both observant and nothing was lost on them; yet the time and surroundings, notwithstanding these small drawbacks were soothing in the extreme; even the old domestic, Martha, as she went in and out of the room, was a picturesque object, and the vista of the glowing kitchen, seen through the open door, was a pleasant sight.

"This Calverdale of yours is a delightful spot," said Mr. Stanford, as he took his leave of the family; for he was to sleep at the village inn, whilst his friend remained at the vicarage by medical orders, for the night.

"Humph!" grunted Mr. Clave. "Yes! I suppose you are willing to live and die here?"

"Well! Perhaps not exactly that; for a short time—it is perfection," answered the young man.

"The scene would pall upon you!"

The vicar and his guest were standing in the porch in the dusk.

"You are severe on my vitiated tastes. I am not used to such quietude; it would not suit me always! Now it is just what I need, and I shall carry a dream of your Calverdale back to my dark London chambers; and how shall I thank you enough for your courtesy to my friend and myself?"

"I have done little to merit thanks. Good-night, Mr. Stanford!"

Guy Stanford strolled out into the scented night, thinking as he went, but he turned several times to glance at the vicarage; there were glittering lights in upstairs rooms—the hours were early in the country.

"What a lovely face the child has, the red hair is actually no disfigurement!" he said to himself, and smiled at the remembrance of some pretty, saucy speech of Michael's, when her father seemed not to be attending to the conversation. "The old gentleman was disappointed, and was once very ambitious; he is somewhat harsh to the girls. By Jove! I wish the graceful trio were relatives—say cousins of mine. I wish—but what Guy wished remained unspoken, for he came into violent contact with someone else, under the shadow of a high hedge, and recognized the curate in the dimness.

"I was just going to look for your farmhouse, Dacre. I've been spending a clerical evening, and expected to see you enter every moment."

"Oh! Mr. Clave is not particularly hospitable to me," said Horace, laughing; "but I have so much to say to you that I don't know where to begin. It was such a relief when I heard your voice!"

"You are not tired of rusticity, old fellow?"

"No—no—but I'm going to leave this place! I am going to vex my godfather and guardian very much!"

"Why! What is the matter? You're not hipped, surely?"

"No; but I feel as if I could not breathe freely here! I don't want to linger out my life fattening for a rich living. I am ashamed to say that I have mistaken my profession—"

"Honest and restless as of old! What are you going to do?"

"Emigrate!"

Guy Stanford whistled. "Now, that would be foolish. Stay in England—whatever else you may do. You would be spoiling your prospect in a worldly sense."

"Stanford! I do not care for patronage!" burst forth from the young man's lips, vehemently. "I do not mind what I do to win

success, but I do not desire too much lifting."

"And you are in a hurry to make a fortune!"

"A fortune! Is not a fortune a good thing?"

"Decidedly! Especially if one is in love, Horace Dacre," observed Stanford, quickly. "I admire your *inamorata* immensely; she is very charming!"

Horace Dacre was frankness itself, when his romance was not brought under inspection, but he was shy even of the congratulation of an old friend.

"What do you mean?" he asked, coldly.

"Must I not notice it? Oh! I may be wrong, but I fancied that perhaps there might have been some love-passages between you and one of the vicar's daughters."

"Oh! they are nice girls—the golden-haired one particularly; she is really out of the common," said the curate, carelessly.

"Miss Michael? (outlandish name) Yes, you admire her the most, then?"

"I admire her very much; I admire them all!"

Mr. Dacre changed the subject so awkwardly that he entirely failed to mislead his companion; but Margaret was not spoken of, to the relief of her reticent lover.

These two men had been intimate at college, and were really attached to one another; but still a secret reserve made a gulf between them.

"Heigho! I feel as if I could grow into a poet here," said Guy, stretching his arms lazily; "but before a mighty intellectual effort I must smoke, and muse far into the night."

"Nonsense! you'll be asleep in ten minutes after you have lain down, in this locality; it's a regular Sleepy Hollow. I could not vegetate here for ever."

Horace was looking back now, pensively.

"They are all asleep at the vicarage, or will be in another half-hour, and to-morrow they will contentedly go through the same humdrum round of small duties (the girls, I mean); there's a Dorcas-meeting at the house of the most disagreeable old maid in the village, and I shall see the trio demurely walking to it and coming home again."

"You do not seem to be in a peculiarly happy frame of mind, my friend."

Horace laughed, and the conversation flagged, as the two young men proceeded at a leisurely pace towards their destination.

"Provoking that Fellowes should have come to grief!"

"What sort of man is he?" asked Horace, indifferently.

"I like him, he's every inch a gentleman, and he is clever."

"Humph—is he well off?"

"I should say not, he studies economy—perhaps mere than I do."

"Married?"

"Not a marrying man; I believe you are jealous already, Horace Dacre. You want some knocking about in the world to harden you."

"Come—come! I am no milkop."

They entered the farmhouse, two rooms of which were devoted to the Calverdale curate's lodging. In the large, dimly-lit, old sitting-room, there was a supper tray laid for two, and dishes of home-cured ham and cold beef, with tempting salad and a country loaf.

"I am quite hungry, I'm ashamed to say," exclaimed Guy Stanford, taking a seat. "Here's something like a letter—it's a telegram!"

"A telegram! It is for me, forwarded from—"

exclaimed Dacre, quickly tearing it open. "Mr. Frere is ill, I am summoned to Granby Court at once. I must go to-morrow."

CHAPTER III.

IN THE VICARAGE GARDEN.

MARGARET CLAVE sat in a bower at the end of the long garden; she had sought the quietest

nook she could discover to dream over her romance, to pet it, and recall all that had happened that was pleasant for the last few weeks of her hitherto, uneventful life.

A lover, when love was an unspoken word at the vicarage, a story book, a smuggled prize; but a lover had readily appeared!

"The other curates were all stupid, or papa would not have let them speak to us; but this one is better than any of them; Horace Dacre is a nice name! Old Miss Haggard was right; she said once that if a girl was kept in a hand-box the man destined for her would come and take her out."

Margaret rested her pretty chin upon her hand, that was as sunburnt as a boy's, and considered what she would like to happen by-and-by. How was her father's peculiar disinclination to all young men to be got over? Horace would sure to want to marry her; would he ever dare to ask the important question? She was terribly in awe of her father, and everyone else must be so.

Perhaps the very obstacles that she conjured up made her fancies more alluring; and it was a triumph to have a lover—so many of the Calverdale girls were obliged to remain unmarried, because there was literally no one to marry them; and Margaret knew that the handsome curate had a great many secret worshippers—that his glances were eagerly watched for every Sunday.

"I never was sure, until yesterday, that he looked at me most; but of course, he must have done so all the while. I wonder how I shall meet him again! What will he say when he comes back? and where can he be going? I hope it won't be for a very long time! Love of my heart! It is very nice to be made love to; he seemed to think I am pretty. I suppose I must be. I am so glad!"

"Margaret! Margaret! Oh! there you are. We have been looking for you everywhere! Papa wants you in the library."

It was Michael who spoke; her red cheeks, streaming in the sunshine, were pushed back from a finely-formed forehead. The two sisters bore no family resemblance, and were most dissimilar in character; but they were tenderly attached to one another.

"What for, do you know, Michael?" asked Margaret, apprehensively. "I am afraid of papa to-day; he looks so cross. He never spoke to me all the breakfast time, and he read the longest prayer he could find in the *Daily Manual*—he always chooses that when he is out of temper."

"I don't know, dear. You had better make haste; I'll sit here and wait for you. Isn't the house pleasant with somebody besides ourselves in it? Mr. Fellowes is going to the Crown and Star after dinner, though. Oh! I have got him to tell me all about London. Margy, my dear, you don't know what a plan I am hatching in my head! Oh! you couldn't guess. It's to make money, and save it to go to London in a year or two."

Michael gleefully danced into the bower and enthroned herself, after vigorously kissing the irresponsible Margaret.

"What's the matter? How dull you are to-day! I thought you would have been wild, as I am, after our company last night. It has done me so much good, I feel as if I could do anything. But what can be the matter with you?"

"Oh!" said Margaret, with immense dignity; "if you haven't eyes, and can't see what is before your nose, I can't help you."

"Can't see!"

"What is happening? But I'll go to papa, and I dare say I shall be ready to wish I never was born presently."

Margaret nodded wisely and sorrowfully, and went into the house with a soberer step than usual.

"I thought I knew every in and out of her!" ejaculated Michael; "but I can't; she isn't Margaret at all to-day. Well, she hasn't been quite herself lately. I wonder—"

The girl's deep, blue eyes were seriously sweet as she pondered. "We three together,

for our lives; we three with only ourselves to care for! Were we meant always to stay here? Last night seems to have awakened me out of a sleep. I never realized how grand and beautiful the world was until they talked about the things I wished to hear of. How papa tried to stop them; but they didn't know that they were on forbidden ground. How I should like to see a play!"

Michal drew out of her big apron pocket an old, torn, dingy volume—a precious possession, for it was a Shakespeare—that she had found in a lumber-room long ago and appropriated, knowing the contents now almost by heart.

Michal was always in earnest about everything she undertook; if she mended a stocking, or was helping old Martha in the kitchen, she put her whole energy into the task. And her affections were passions; she did nothing by halves—she did not understand feeble likings and genteel neutrality.

This wonderful book suited her; it carried her fresh imagination into a realm where she encountered men and women with whom she could sympathise, and whom she could understand, not the less because the circumstances of their lives were utterly removed from her own. Michal was a poet in her soul, and the king poet Shakespeare inspired her with his creations, till they seemed alive in her.

She could never get Margaret to listen to her rhapsodies with very much interest. Margaret called her silly sometimes, but Anne generally was ready when she wanted to disburden her heart or fancy; but Michal felt that nobody quite comprehended her at home.

"I hope I am not a very wicked person," she soliloquised, to-day; "but I should like to sit here in this sunshine for hours, and read until I grow into being someone else. Oh! I wish there could be another Hamlet, and that I could see him."

"Miss Cleve!"

A voice broke in upon Michal's meditation; she sprang up, all her movements were elastic and breezy—and she beheld one of her recent acquaintances smiling at her through a gap in the hedge that existed beside the bower.

"I saw you and could not resist stopping," said Guy Stanford. "Do you often come here to read?"

"Yes," she answered, laconically, and she looked up into his face with the grave curiosity of a child.

His steady, keen, dark eyes looked down into hers quietly for little more than a moment, and a burning blush covered her face—she drew back with a sudden shyness.

"Oh! please don't," she murmured; "I—I did not mean to stare at you; it was rude of me. I always do it unawares to myself when I first know people."

"Nothing that you would do could be rude," said Mr. Stanford—his voice was low-toned and rich. Michal was fastidious about voices, and had a very acute ear for music; she listened to him as if she were hearkening to a melody, but she did not lift her long lashes again, and the delicate bloom fluctuated upon her cheek fitfully.

"You will be sorry to lose my friend, Dacre," continued Guy, after a short pause. "Is he going away? Nobody has told me of it."

Her colour changed again, because he was watching her; but she set it down to his inadvertent news.

"If I were a man I would not stay in such a place as this!" she said, presently; "it is all very well for a short time, but there is so little to do. No one is very bad—I mean in need of reformation—and there is no danger to encounter. One has to go on in the same groove day after day. It is dull."

"It must be Margaret, not Michal," thought Stanford, rather relieved.

"Your father has found a home here; he does not seem inclined to move out of his Eden."

"Oh! but papa is not young—and he is always looked up within himself. Mr. Stanford, do you always live in London?"

"I do," he answered, amused at her question. "I have what are called chambers in the Strand, and am there summer and winter, except when I pay a country visit or take a holiday, as I am doing now. I get tired of bricks and mortar sometimes; but habit is second nature, and London is the centre of civilization, the best place for me to live in."

"In the Strand!" she repeated; "that is near the river?"

"Yes; but I don't see the river from my windows, only the great thoroughfare that is always flowing into the city."

"I should like to go to London," said Michal, meditatively.

Guy Stanford laughed kindly; and then he began to give her a graphic description of the marvels that were in existence, but had never entered into her wildest visions.

It was worth some trouble to watch her changing countenance, and the man of the world found himself absolutely entertained by this naive little "creature of impulse."

He drew her out, and answered her many questions with more pleasure than with which he had entertained a fashionable lady before leaving town at a garden-party, though this dame was as fair as she was fashionable.

"Do ladies ever go to London by themselves?" asked Michal, presently; "and do they live there—those who have no gentlemen relatives?"

"Frequently," he replied, repressing a smile, for she was very eager now.

"Do you know any such ladies?" she inquired.

"Many—indeed, I have some cousins, single ladies, living at Baywater," he said, but he winced a little at the enforced remembrance of one of these said cousins.

"Oh! have you? Are they young?"

"They are older than you are, I imagine."

"Oh! do they go to see plays and operas?"

"They often do, but I generally accompany them, as they have neither father nor brother."

Michal ceased to question; she leant her head against the jasmine clusters thoughtfully and pulled down a bunch of white roses idly till it became a coronal for her glittering hair.

There was an unfinished letter in Guy Stanford's writing-case that he had intended to convey to the post that morning, but he was in no mood to return to the farmhouse and write. He had so little to say to his cousin Maude Stanford he would wait until the morrow, and in the meantime he could spend a few hours in the sunshine and study the character of the vicar's daughter, who was unique in her way.

So the moments fled in pleasant ease, until an interruption came in the shape of Miss Margaret—Margaret, with a pink nose and swollen eyes.

She regarded Stanford with startled vexation, as if she did not want a strange witness of her distress.

Michal was all sympathy in an instant after a glance at her sister's countenance; so his amusement was ended for the nonce, and, with a courteous leave-taking, he strolled away towards the village, to find his friend Mr. Fellowes seated in state in a country car on his way to Mill Farm.

Companionship was welcome, for the curate had already taken his departure on the receipt of a second telegram from Mr. Frere—and Calverdale possessed no patents for killing time.

"I'm so sorry I have inconvenienced you, Stanford. Don't wait for me. Go on with our prescribed route, and I'll join you when I can," said Fellowes.

"No," responded his friend, magnanimously, "I shall wait here for you."

CHAPTER IV.

DOMESTIC CLOUDS.

MR. CLEVE looked gloomily round him in his library as he waited for Margaret.

The room was dingy and ugly because the severe clergyman preferred to have it unadorned.

He had persuaded himself that he looked on life as a trial, and would yield to none of its graces or hollow pleasures.

Everything about him was sternly uncompromising—almost monastic—in its disregard of beauty. Were his surroundings a reflex of his mind?

The vicar was going to express himself very decidedly to his daughter. She must put this love folly out of her head completely. He did not wish his children to marry early; and this particular marriage would never gain his consent. He had reasons for special dislike to "the alliance," as he pompously called it—reasons—that he would scarcely acknowledge to himself.

He had strong feelings beneath his reserve, and his dislikes were very difficult to uproot.

He disliked Mr. Frere, Horace Dacre's guardian, with the whole intensity of a narrow but concentrated nature.

As a young man, Horace Frere had been at college with him, and had won most things that George Cleve had striven for; and Margaret's mother had married him long ago, only (he discovered afterwards) because she had had a lover's quarrel with his friend Frere, and was ready to sacrifice herself in a fit of pique to anybody. She did so, and deeply regretted it all the rest of her days; and Frere came in for a fortune, but never married.

It was most disagreeable to the vicar when he found that his new curate was a *protégé* of his quondam friend.

Mr. Cleve put no faith in woman. He had been once deceived, and that was enough for him.

Margaret was very like her mother, whose portrait gazed down upon the dusty bookshelves and littered writing-table. The widower thought so as he uneasily turned his back upon the fair young face he had once called angelic in its loveliness. He fumbled with his sermon paper, and could not find his parcel of good quill pens. He wanted to seem occupied on his daughter's entrance, for he wished the interview over; he hated tears and palaver—pahaw! There she was coming in with a bewildered, childlike expression in her blue eyes.

"My—my dear," began the father, "I have no time to speak to you very freely to-day. I (he fidgeted) must be as brief as possible. You are very young, Margaret."

"I don't think so, papa. I'm twenty."

"You look much younger. I had forgotten that you were more than sixteen. Michal is sixteen, isn't she?"

"No; Michal is nineteen, and Anne is twenty-two," answered Margaret, with reproach in her tone.

"At all events, you are very young—too young and unformed to dream of marriage—for many years."

Margaret's eyes met those of the portrait appealingly. She guessed the sequel.

"It is my desire that you give no encouragement to any person who may imagine himself at liberty to address you on such a subject. Mr. Dacre has presumed—on his having permission to visit here as my curate—presumed to talk some nonsense to you and about you."

Margaret grew very red. She was afraid of her father, but she had something at stake too. It made her bold.

"Oh, papa!" she exclaimed, "you think things are nonsense that other people like."

"Be silent, Margaret! You are not to meet or converse with this young man again. He has gone away already, and we are to see no more of him. He is unsettled and unreliable, and will do better abroad than in the Church, which he intends to leave. When you do marry—if ever you should do so—I shall take care that you are given to a different sort of person."

Margaret began to weep vehemently.

"I—I—don't—care," she sobbed. "I won't

marry a—different sort of person—and it's not nonsense."

Mr. Cleve rose, and taking her by the shoulder led her gently into an inner room. He put her into a chair, and reached down from a shelf a book that was meant to benefit her. It was a volume of sermons on the various sins that lead the flesh astray. There was one smart tirade on "disobedience," and the vicar left it open in Margaret's hand.

"When you have read that come to me," he said, and sat down to his desk, worried and cross.

There was no sound in the library but the scratching of a villanous quill and Margaret's sobs for about half-an-hour.

"Where do women's tears flow from?" queried the irate clergyman, unable to progress with his work. "Are you reading, Margaret?" he asked, angrily.

"N—no—no." The pen spluttered, and the writer's ideas got somewhat mixed. He rather prided himself on his clear style and was annoyed; but who could compose a rhetorical discourse, calculated to impress a congregation with its sinfulness, whilst a woman was crying loudly within hearing, and the other Margaret looked sorrowfully at him?

The clock struck the hour. He could bear it no longer.

"Margaret, have you read the sermon?" he asked, solemnly.

"N—no," she sobbed, as before.

"Read it through carefully, and you may go to your sisters."

In five minutes she had replaced the book on its shelf and was slipping out of the room, when he stopped her.

"Come here, Margaret! Have you read every word of that sermon?"

"Indeed, I have."

"What was it about?" he demanded.

"Oh, papa, don't speak like that!" cried the delinquent. "I did read it, every word, and it was horrid; but I am too confused to repeat it—how could I? I haven't disobeyed you yet, have I?"

"Recollect that you never indulge in conversation about this foolish business with your sisters. I forbid you to discuss it. Girls are silly sometimes, I know, over what they believe to be their love matters. My daughters must be above such idiooy. Lovers or love must never be mentioned between you. You can go now."

Sullenly she withdrew, and shut Mr. Cleve again into his favourite gloom; but an echo of her sobs pursued and scattered his ideas, and spoiled the morning for him.

"What does he know about girls?" muttered Margaret, as she passed through the kitchen, where Anne was making a pudding, and Martha peeling potatoes, for the early dinner.

"I suppose papa would keep me here till I got old and ugly, doing house-work (because he won't have a younger servant to help Martha) and reading tracts. I hate tracts. I don't believe a word they say!"

Anne looked up from her paste-board smiling.

"Michal is in the garden, dear; take your work to the arbour."

"Oh! I won't be ordered about by you, Miss Anne!" exclaimed Margaret. "I've had enough to vex me to-day."

"I was not ordering," said Anne, quietly; but she scanned her sister's face rapidly and understood her ruffled condition.

Anne was one of those women with whom tact is an intuition, and whose delicate refinement is able to understand natures far beneath their own.

Alas! there are scores of dainty creatures who are weak but not gentle, and who are capable of inflicting deep wounds by their own obtuseness.

The vicar had a treasure in this sweet, eldest child, but he did not know it. He only knew that Anne's abilities had not been considered equal to her sisters.

"I was not ordering you, Margaret. I'm sure you have a headache; we must try to go for a long ramble by-and-by."

"Oh, yes, I should like that; but there's that Dorcas meeting."

"You need not come to it; and we may have two hours to ourselves before the time."

Margaret listlessly went out; she had a dull, spiritless droop in her that was unlike her usual bright self.

Old Martha had seen these girls grow up from their childhood, and she loved them faithfully.

"Ah! Miss Anne," she said, "you bonnie lasses won't be together very long. I'm an old body, and I can see signs and tokens of a change; when one goes, the other birds will leave the nest. Maybe next year. I'll have only the old clock for company. I wish master would have it set right before that."

Anne silently rolled her paste and finished her task; then she went to the window. She could see down the long walk that wound towards the Jasmine Bowers. Margaret was slowly passing beneath the boughs of the chestnuts, her hair glittering in the sun; and at the gap in the hedge she saw Michal in earnest talk with someone in the road. A movement of Michal's head revealed the guest of the previous day.

Anne sighed a soft, little, regretful sigh. Her sisters seemed to be entering into some new experiences that she might never be taught. She was young, but her position as "Miss Cleve" seemed to place her out of the reach of possible wooers. "No one had ever cared to look at her," she thought, "and no one would ever say, 'I love you!' I must be content," she thought. "I have my father to love and my duty to do."

CHAPTER V.

ADIEU.

"PAPA is dreadfully cruel!" sobbed Margaret, when she and her favourite sister were alone in the arbour. "If he goes on like this I know I shall die!"

"Die! nonsense," said Michal. "I daresay everything will be better by-and-by. I guessed that Mr. Dacre was in love with one of us, but I fancied it might be Anne. Well, my darling, if it's any consolation to you to hear it, I quite approve of him for a brother-in-law."

Margaret blushed. She had only begun to think of Horace as a lover. Matrimony was far away from her imagination at present. She was in the first sweet stage of a girl's romance: in that exquisitely blissful half-dream that is shy of its own shadow. But it was delightful to hear her lover's name mentioned; the sound had a new significance for her; it was musical too from Michal's lips.

"It must be good to be loved—good to be in love," murmured Michal, softly; and she looked into the depths of the summer sky wistfully, with eyes of the same colour.

"I wonder who will fall in love with you, Michal?"

"With me!" and she laughed. "Oh! nobody, of course. Red hair is an objection; and I wouldn't return the tender passion unless I could find a Hamlet. Oh! I do like Hamlet so much! I can fancy the prince alive and standing here. I mean I can make a picture of him for myself."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated the more prosaic Margaret. "What is he like, pray?"

"Not in the least like your Horace. He is taller, more slender, with a dark, oval face, and dark eyes that are more eloquent than eyes ever were before; and I can hear him speak. Oh! he has such a voice."

Margaret looked at her enthusiastic sister, doubtfully, but Michal was absolutely in earnest, though she was describing Guy Stanford.

"What a funny girl you are!" Margaret observed, and then returned to her grievance with pleasurable pain, refusing to be diverted from it.

"What does papa mean to do with us? He

never allows us to enjoy ourselves in the mildest way. He won't let us have any girl friends or acquaintances. He thinks everything a sin that isn't in the Prayer-book. I am afraid that if I were to go on like this for years and years I should become another Miss Buckler."

Miss Buckler was the most ill-tempered and mischievous old maid in the parish, and universally hated.

"We must have a little patience. If things grow worse with us, Margy, I have a scheme! But I won't say what it is yet."

And nothing more would the young optimist broach on the subject, but she took a studious fit from that day, and was never seen without a lesson-book of some kind in her hand, but she did not seek the arbour until Margaret reported that a gentleman on a bicycle had been seen on the road.

After that news, to which she appeared indifferent, she would seat herself amongst the roses and jasmine and lose herself in her self-imposed tasks.

Anne silently wondered what was changing Michal into a devoted scholar, but she suspected the truth.

A fortnight went by. Horace Dacre did not return to Calverdale, and there was silence respecting him at the vicarage. The girls ardently desired to hear Miss Buckler in full chatter, she would be sure to say something about him; she always repeated every report she heard, with additions of her own; but chance did not favour them.

Miss Buckler had a cold, and did not attend the Dorcas meetings; and the Cleves went to no tea-gatherings where scandal and conversation were available. They heard of nothing that was mooted at Calverdale, except old Martha came in for a gossip with a neighbouring farmer's wife.

But the two gentlemen were still in the village; they had both taken up their quarters at the Inn, and were lions for the time, as few strangers sojourned in that quiet locality for more than a day or so.

Mr. Fellowes was under medical treatment, but fast recovering from the effects of his fall, and Guy Stanford contented himself with making daily excursions, exhaust the country for miles around, until his travelling companion should be able to accompany him.

He generally proceeded on his journeys early in the morning, coming back when the dusk was gathering and the whole fair country apparently sinking into a reverie. Then he would pause at a gap in a certain hedge and hold a few moments' low converse with Michal, who was alone at that hour. Only a few commonplace passed between them; but words are of no value sometimes, and a look or a tone without price.

Guy Stanford would continue his ride thoughtfully, and he never told Mr. Fellowes why he had lingered, though often the late dinner was not improved by the non-appearance of the gentleman at the appointed time.

One morning the bicycle did not pass. Margaret remarked that perhaps Mr. Fellowes had got well enough to go away. Martha was told that he had driven out on the preceding evening and had bought ever so many jars of honey to take or send to London, and had bespoken two big country loaves also from old Mrs. Hilders.

"So they must be going soon," she added. "I shall be sorry, because it was nice even to watch for a passing stranger in such a dull hole as Calverdale."

Michal looked up from her book with a fluctuating colour. She said nothing, but she slipped away as soon as she could. There had been a heavy thunder shower, the garden was damp, but she paced the wet walks restlessly, only fearing a summons into the dreary house.

"He will not come to-day," she said, like another Mariana, and she listened for the loud road echoes in vain. "Perhaps they are gone, but he would have said that he was going. Oh! if I might but see him once more just to say good-bye; that is all I want."

She went to the arbour at last, and a rain of

rose leaves fell on her head as she entered and sat down. It was some time before she awoke to the fact that someone was gazing at her through the hedge-gap. It was Guy Stanford, and Michal dashed away her tears proudly as her face grew like a rose.

"You have not gone for a ride?" she said, carelessly.

"No. My friend and I have been making farewells; so many have been civil to us. We are going to-morrow very early, and by train, to the seaside for a few days."

"Going to-morrow!" she said.

"Yes, but I shall carry away a pleasant memory with me, and—"

Guy Stanford was a hardened man of the world, but he winced when he saw the girl's expression. He knew that he was in honour-bound to let no fancy run away with him, but this little daughter of an obscure country clergyman was fascinating. The cold words were arrested; he had meant just to bid her a polite farewell.

"My child!" he said instead, his voice growing tender; "I am truly sorry to go. I shall never forget your sweetness or the happiness that you have given me."

"Have given you happiness?" she repeated, softly, and a light dawned in her eyes that had never shone in them before.

He seemed her beau ideal of all that could make life beautiful. She thought him infinitely good, above her in everything, for she had a large organ of veneration that chiefly, as yet, came into play when her affections were concerned.

"You have, indeed. You are the dearest of fairies," he said, in a lighter tone, for he was afraid of self-betrayal.

She did not like that term much, her face changed.

"Why were you crying?" he asked, in a whisper.

"I had something to cry for, I suppose," she answered, with a touch of womanliness that delighted Stanford.

That pride was enchanting, for it revealed her heart.

"Michal, I am going away, will you give me a rose—a red rose—to keep as a memento from you?" he whispered, for the moment of parting had come, his friend was awaiting him.

Michal mechanically plucked a flower that was glowing like a jewel in the fitful sunshine. She held it towards Stanford, timidly, in her small brown hand, in which sundry sharp thorns were sticking viciously.

Stanford caught the hand and passionately kissed it.

"Farewell, my sweet, little darling!" he said, and would have touched her face if she had not drawn back like a startled gazelle.

"Humph! that little episode of sentiment is over," he muttered, as he strode away, but he held the rose carefully, and his handsome dark face grew rather haggard for a little while, till he met his friend at the end of the lane that ran on one side of the vicarage garden.

"How long you have been, Stanford!" exclaimed Mr. Fellowes, from his seat in a pony-carriage. "This animal has been too highly-farried—wants to be going continually. I've been drawn into everybody's garden since, and made drink quarts of cowslip wine; and I have said adieu to the vicar—I must say he is not very agreeable. He regretted that he was out, however, when you left your card, and hoped we were benefited by our stay at Calverdale—all that sort of insincere twaddle. He asked me who you were—fancy that!—and if you were married."

"Indeed!" said Stanford, with a forced laugh; "and what did you say? My celibacy could not affect him!"

Fellowes shrugged his shoulders.

"I said you were who you are, my boy, and that I considered you were as good as married, as you had been engaged for years and years to your cousin Miss Stanford."

"The deuce you did!"

"Why shouldn't I? It's a true bill! Come, now, we have no more time to lose. Heigho! I should have liked to stay and make myself agreeable to Anne Clave, but I'm such an old bachelor, I wonder if—but why are you lingering, Stanford?"

"I'm in as great a hurry as you are—there, my rose is gone down in the dust."

"Never mind it, you don't mean to say that you were going to turn back for a rubbishy flower? you can buy baskets full presently."

"No, I can't—not one like that—it was unique," said Stanford, with a hard smile on his well-cut lips.

"You're an odd fellow! I can't make you out."

Stanford turned from his friend's scrutiny, and, seizing the reins, drove madly off, regardless of expostulations.

CHAPTER VI.

DISCONTENT AND A RESOLUTION.

THE sun shone brilliantly after the rain, and Michal was too restless to wish to stay within doors. She seemed to need breathing space; she wanted to wander across the breezy downs, and catch a gleam of the distant sea. Her thoughts were in a whirl; she was happy and wretched by turns, and unable to comprehend the state of her own feelings.

But at dinner—at which repeat the vicar encouraged no general conversation—that gentleman was more talkative than usual; he condescended to tell his daughters that Mr. Fellowes had left "his compliments" for them.

The message had been "most kind remembrances and regrets at not being fortunate enough to see them."

"Mr. Stanford left cards," continued the vicar, sombrely—Michal was crimson, and stared fixedly into her plate—"they are not the sort of young men that I care to welcome; they are of the world worldly, and I am sure they are delighted to leave our quietude. They are going to Fullborough for a week, and then to London, where Mr. Stanford is to be married next month to his cousin."

Mr. Cleve spoke in cold, even tones, and shot one glance towards Margaret and Michal. Anne responded only to his intelligence, and out of mere politeness, for there was nothing to say except "Oh!" or "Indeed!"

But Michal's cheeks grew white, she did not lift her eyes; by a determined effort she controlled herself until she could move from the table and take refuge in solitude.

"Michal, are you going out? Wait for me," said Margaret, but she was astonished when she saw her sister's face, and asked what was wrong.

"Nothing much, dear," answered Michal, in a clear, high voice. "I am foolish, that is all, and I want to be alone. I'll come back all right."

"Why, Michal! and I wanted to talk about Horace—"

"By-and-by, dear Margy; let me go, now." She disengaged herself from her sister and ran out and fitted along the garden like a sunbeam, her long hair abiding in the rays of the light that was waning.

It was quite dark when she came home, pale and weary; tea was over. Her father was very angry with her, and questioned her with severity. His daughters did not go out alone, except into the village; he was very stringent in his commands; even Anne was not permitted to wander freely at will.

"Where did you go, Michal?"

"To the Downs."

"To the Downs! Have you walked so far, and at this late hour? Did you meet any one?"

"Only farmers and labourers," she answered, knowing well what he meant. He must have seen her with Guy Stanford at the hedge gap to-day.

"Why did you take this extraordinary freak, Michal?"

"I felt I must have air. Oh! papa, it was no harm."

"Go to your room, and never disobey me again. I will not have my daughters the sport of the scandal-mongers of Calverdale. Go!"

Thankful to be released, Michal rushed upstairs, and looked her door upon her sisters, and then her passionate tears broke forth for the first time, though they brought her no relief.

"Oh, what a fool I am! what a fool I have been!" she cried. "I never dreamt that I was beginning to love him, and now it is too late, and he must have been playing with me—laughing at me—he, who seemed so good. He even cast aside the rose I was silly enough to give him—it was the same rose, I know!"

She drew out a drooping flower that she had found in the lane and tore it to atoms, and she struck her slender wrist vehemently.

"I shall hate my hand, for he has touched it," she thought.

By-and-by the strange frenzy calmed down, she was weak and faint after her unusual excitement, and life was bitter to her young heart.

Anne said, casually, the next day, that the gentlemen had left the inn, and Mr. Cleve told them that another curate was coming to take Mr. Dacre's place.

"Michal, what shall I do?" plained poor Margaret. He will never, never come back any more!"

"Dear, if he loves you, be glad and believe in him," said Michal. "I think he was a true man—at all events, for a little while believe in him and love him."

"Oh! Michal, how can I live on here? it's dreadful! Papa is so stern, Anne so quiet, there is no chance of a change."

Michal looked at her questioningly, seemed about to say something, but repressed it.

"Now, you've got something on your mind?" said Margaret.

"I have; but you must wait patiently, Margy. I want to go to Fullborough to-morrow—I want to go to the theatre—do you hear me? and I mean to go!"

Margaret's breath was taken away in her amazement.

"Michal, are you gone mad?" she ejaculated. "Papa would kill you!"

"Not quite, and I don't wish to be a wicked daughter; if papa only loved me I could not vex him," said Michal, tearfully. "I do want to see a play of Shakespeare's, and they are going to have a morning performance of *King Lear* to-morrow, and I must go. You had better keep out of the scrape, Margy."

Margaret was horrified. Hers was not the bold spirit that was ready to do battle with obstacles at all costs. She would have liked the amusement extremely, and disobedience to her father would not have troubled her conscience much, but she was not brave when action came and something was demanded of her.

"You must not do anything that people might think queer, Margy," continued Michal, with a grandmotherly air; "you must remember your lover."

The next day came, and the determined young lady slipped out of the house early. She only preserved secrecy because she feared to be stopped, but Margaret saw her go out, dressed with her usual plainness, and she quaked inwardly. Of course Michal did not appear at dinner. Anne was troubled, for she was afraid of more domestic broils. Mr. Cleve demanded where Michal was, and, receiving no satisfactory reply, a cloud settled on his brow.

When the absentee made her appearance that evening he summoned her at once to the study to receive sentence. Anne, who had been told of Michal's exploit, was watching for her at the door in a state of alarm.

"Oh! Michal, darling! how could you do such a thing?" she cried.

Michal was looking lovely, her eyes were sparkling with new excitement, and she had the wrought-up expression that betrays an artistic nature.

"Anne, my sweet!" she answered, lovingly, "you are the best and dearest of girls, but you are so differently constituted from me that you would not understand me—but I have fulfilled a dream to-day, and the pleasure I have had is worth a year's worry."

"You forget that you owe duty to your father, Michal. You should not gainsay his wishes."

Michal made a pretty little gesture of deprecation, and defiantly marched to the interview, merely saying,—

"Margaret might have left me to make my own confession."

When she came out of the dreaded audience chamber she was pale and thoughtful.

"My father is unjust," she said to the anxious Anne and curious Margaret; "he would not believe me when I told him that I had gone alone to Fullborough; he accused me of underhand motives; I have never told him a falsehood in my life."

"Well, dear, what else?"

"Oh! Anne, he says I am to be sent to old Miss Gorman as a punishment, and that I am to make ready to go to-morrow morning; he will drive me there himself."

Margaret and Anne both exclaimed in their dismay and sorrow. Miss Gorman was a lady who had a school some miles from Calverdale, she was notorious for the management of refractory young ladies, and kept her pupils in a sort of durance vile till the parents desired their liberty.

"What shall we do? Why—why did you make papa angry?"

"What's done is done!" quoted the delinquent, with a smile; "and I don't mean to go to Miss Gorman's."

"Michal," said Mr. Cleve, suddenly appearing behind the disturbed trio. "You are not in a proper frame of mind; you are forbidden to associate with your sisters at present."

Michal looked at him and put out her hands entreatingly.

"Father!" she said, "do not be so severe; give me a little love and I will never, never displease you again."

"You have entirely forfeited my esteem, Michal. I cannot give you a baseless affection. I do not wish to see or speak to you for a long time."

So the vicar drove all the returning softness out of her, and with a haughtily carried head, she passed him and went up to her room.

"To-morrow, Calverdale will be ringing with gossip about a daughter of mine," said Mr. Cleve, bitterly.

Anne and Margaret wept far into the night, and just as they were dropping asleep a white figure glided into the room they shared together; it was Michal in her night-dress looking weirdly lovely in the moonlight.

"My darling sisters," she said; "I do love you both so much, I felt I must come to you for half-an-hour," and she kissed them again and again, and a great many tears were shed between the three.

"Now," said Michal, at length, "you just shut your eyes and love me as much as ever you can. Don't you both want to come to Miss Gorman's?"

She laughed now, and with many embraces tore herself away.

"Michal may breakfast in her room," said Mr. Cleve, the next morning. "Martha, carry up the tray at once, and tell Miss Michal that I require her to be in readiness to go with me at ten o'clock; see that her clothes are packed in time."

Martha obeyed with some unwillingness, for she was very fond of Michal.

Sundry exclamations from upstairs summoned Anne to the scene; she returned looking frightened.

Michal was not to be found in or out of the house. The small quantity of old-fashioned jewellery, and a fork and spoon, her special property, were also missing.

Mr. Cleve grew divid with anger, but he spoke not, and when the chaise was brought

to the door at ten o'clock he drove off in it, in the Fullborough direction.

The vicar returned alone in the evening, and forbade Anne or Margaret ever to mention Michal's name to him again.

CHAPTER VII.

RESULTS.

THE vicarage, always a grave sort of house, became strangely dull and sad, as if there had been a recent death within its walls. Truly, the blithest and brightest of its home spirits had departed from it. It seemed impossible to Anne and Margaret to realise the fact that Michal would never return, but Mr. Cleve vouchsafed no history of her, and positively forbade all communication between her and the members of his household.

"If I had only the chance to disobey papa! I am afraid I should do it," said Margaret, weeping.

Where was their sweet, wild, loving, Michal? What had she done to offend beyond forgiveness?

Mr. Cleve grew thinner and more cadaverous. It was evident that he was suffering something of the misery that was overwhelming his daughters; but he gave no verbal sign of his pain or sorrow, outwardly he was impassible. They never guessed how intensely irritable his nerves had become of late; he was always morbidly anxious to overhear the village gossip, and afraid that he might hear his own name spoken by more than one stinging tongue. He fancied that Michal had utterly disgraced him; at times he almost hated her; at others, the memory of her graces and delicate loveliness would rush upon him like some rare perfume. She had been more to him than he was aware of.

Anne, whose life was in her affections, became the shadow of herself, she fretted so continually for lost Michal; and when the new curate came to institute more parish work, more meetings of various character, she was glad, for it gave her more to do. The Reverend Ernest Barrett was a conscientious young clergyman, jealous, but painfully shy; but with no low opinion of his own powers, and a conventional gentleness in dealing with the faults and foibles of others. Anne seemed to him an ideal curate's wife—a sort of earthly angel—and he was almost at first sight a silent devotee at her shrine. Mr. Barrett was a great church musician, and he and Anne met twice a week for practice in the old school-room in conjunction with some dozen others, and exchanged a few words of greeting on each occasion; but there was no intimacy between them—nor was there likely to be any with Mr. Cleve continually on the watch. But Anne was not quite so depressed as she used to be, and, despite the trouble that had fallen so suddenly upon them, not so hopeless of a happy future, though Mr. Barrett did not enter into her dreams on any occasion.

Margaret drooped as the months unfolded into a year and there had been no news of Michal, and silence and oblivion concerning her first and only love. Her pretty bloom fled, her eyes grew languid, and she was beginning to be really out of health and a prey to morbid fancies.

One day, as she was returning from a meeting at the school-house, Anne remaining behind to examine another class, she was startled to see a tall figure leaning over a stile in a lane near the vicarage. Something familiar in the attitude arrested her; she recognized Mr. Guy Stanford before he had turned round.

"Miss Cleve!" he exclaimed, lifting his hat, advancing quickly. "this is an agreeable surprise. I am only here for an hour or so, and should have had no time to call at the vicarage. How are Mr. Cleve and your sisters?"

Margaret drew back from him with a new and instinctive dislike; she looked at his handsome face doubtfully.

"Why!" he exclaimed, "what a punishment to my vanity. I believe that Miss Margaret Cleve has forgotten me!"

"No, I have not," she answered; "but I can't, oh! I can't speak to you as if you were a friend."

He coloured slightly and evaded her glance. "Please to let me pass, papa would not like me to speak to you," she faltered. "I cannot help being rude."

"Why should Mr. Cleve be displeased at your speaking to me?" he demanded, with some curiosity; his face was expressive, and he nervously looked down at his well-gloved hands and toyed with a cigar-case he held as he spoke.

"Mr. Stanford, I suppose I ought not to tell you, but I will," said Margaret, with an effort. "We have lost our Michal, and you are to blame for it."

"Lost your sister!" he echoed; "and I to blame!"

"She went away a year ago, and we have never heard from her since. She was so unhappy here that she could not bear to stay. Papa is severe and was angry with her because—because you made her care for you!"

"Good heavens! This must be cleared up! I cannot exist under such a charge. I never spoke of love to your sister!"

"Mr. Stanford, Michal was too proud to have cared for you unless you had asked her to do so. You must have made her love you!" persisted Margaret, bursting into tears.

"You are wrong; you are accusing me of dishonourable conduct. I was an engaged man when I was here a year ago!"

"But my sister did not know it until after you were gone," sobbed Margaret, resolutely, turning away from him.

"Miss Michal, no doubt, would set your mind at rest on this unpleasant subject if she were here."

Margaret would listen to no more that Guy Stanford had to say. The year of suffering she had undergone had altered her; she was firmer and braver, and better worth Horace Dacre's love, if he had known it.

Mr. Stanford whistled softly to himself as she left him, and absently trod the dust-heaps in the dry road as he walked at some speed away from the vicarage. He took the next train for Fullborough and Seaham.

Margaret went home weeping bitterly.

It was a hazy, warm afternoon, the windows were open and the dark passages flashed with sunshine; the old-fashioned kitchen with its low ceiling and brick floor, looked comfortable as Margaret glanced into it; Martha was baking, and there was a nice odour, spreading abroad the fume of an oven that never got out of order.

"Miss Margaret, is that you, dear?" said Martha. "I've been looking for you. My Jen's had a letter—such a queer thing—and it's for you, he says. I was in doubt what to do with it, as it might not be proper for you to read—the master might like to have it first."

"A letter for me! Where is it? Oh, Martha!"

Margaret snatched a much-thumbed envelope that Martha indicated with a floury elbow—"Martha, Martha, don't tell anyone about this!" cried Margaret, in strange excitement. "My dear missie, I'm bound to. The master would kill me if I wasn't faithful and true."

Margaret ran off; she went upstairs to Michal's deserted chamber and looked herself in to read Michal's letter.

"My own dear, dear, darling Michal, oh, how thankful I am!"

She was so shaken and nervous that she could scarcely break the seal. It was not a long letter, Michal was never very diffuse, but Margaret kissed it ecstatically many times as she read.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LETTER.

THE letter ran thus:—

"MY DEAREST SISTER—

"I have written to you repeatedly since I bade good-bye to my old home, but I am sure that my father has prevented my letters from

reaching you. I have, I believe, angered him beyond recall. I feel such a yearning for you, my Margaret, that I am going to do something else, so that a word from me may reach you. I shall direct this under cover to Martha Huntly's son, with a desire that the enclosure be given to you only; if this means fails I shall be at a loss what to do. I left Calverdale thinking that as Fallborough was a large place I might lose my identity in it, and get employment, either at a school as a junior teacher, or even in a shop as an assistant. I had so little money—only three pounds—to take with me, and I was afraid I might starve soon if I were not fortunate.

"You will wonder how I even possessed so much money. I sold all my small stock of jewellery when I went to see the play. You are unlike me in character and in tastes. You will be, perhaps, nearly as shocked as my father was when you hear what I did with myself. I was passing the Fullborough theatre (it is on the outskirts of the town). I was carrying my bag, I was tired and set it down, whilst I looked longingly at the placards and bills that were outside the building. They were to play *Hamlet* that night. As I was lingering, wondering where I should go next, a gentleman came out of the theatre and glanced at me curiously; he was a kind-looking, elderly man, closely shaven, and evidently an actor.

"He asked me, very politely, if I was the lady who had answered his advertisement. I heartily wished I had been; but I told him that I was in search of an employment agency, and then he asked me if I would mind speaking to his wife, who was in want of a teacher for her little girl, who was delicate. Mrs. Forman was in the theatre and he took me to her. Oh! Margaret, I cannot convey an idea of their great goodness to me; knowing nothing of me, these people took me back with them to their lodging, and engaged me as governess for their child; and they were so delicate in their kindness—so generous. I feel my heart glowing whilst I write of them. Mrs. Forman is still young, and has been extremely handsome, but they have had misfortunes and are only now prospering again.

"I was governess to their dear little Mary until she died—for we lost her six months ago—and then the Formans would not let me leave them. Mr. F. discovered that I had a good talent for the stage; that I was an enthusiast, and enjoyed their Bohemian style of living; he gave me the necessary instruction, and I made my *début* some weeks since, and am 'in the dear profession' as the Formans call it, and proud to be a member.

"We are going to Australia very soon. I am in your neighbourhood—at least, an hour and a-half's journey would bring you to me. I long to see you again. You are of age—and I have done nothing really wicked. Can you not come to me, Margaret? My father found me at the Formans, and was so scandalized that he was glad to leave me where I was. Did he tell you of our stormy interview? Poor father! I love him better than he loves me, though I have sinned against him. My Margaret, do come. I am to play 'Cordelia' to-morrow evening at Seaham. I shall be in the house all the afternoon. Come—come! Ask for 'Miss Grey,' when you find Vine Cottage; it is close to the theatre, and we have a view of the glorious sea from the front window. Do come if you love me still. I shall be far away from you soon. Keep dear Anne in ignorance until you return, or write to her.—Your loving sister,

"MICHAL."

Margaret was timid by nature, but she was strongly attached to Michal. It seemed a dreadful thing to brave the vicar's anger, but the "Come—come!" had more force than her fears; it decided her. She would go and at once, before Martha's truthfulness and fidelity came into play—before Anne's suspicions were aroused.

Fluttering and trembling like a frightened bird, Margaret hastened her preparations. She dressed herself in the darkest dress she had,

and packed a few articles of clothing in a small hand-bag that had done duty hitherto in the transporting of "material" to the Dorcas and other work meetings.

"For," she said, "perhaps I may stay away a day or two—perhaps I may never be allowed to come back."

Half afraid of her own shadow, she stepped softly down the old oaken staircase—there was Anne in the passage, dear Anne! Margaret was inclined to run into her room again, but Anne was not alone. The new curate was talking in a shy, awkward fashion, and Anne was explaining something, and asking him to wait for Mr. Cleve in the study.

Margaret feeling that it was a now or never with her, descended the second flight quickly, and reached the sunlight unperceived, glad that the day was fair.

"Anne is so good, she would stop me," she said, and she kept under cover of the hedge when she had gained the road. Several acquaintances passed her, but as there was nothing particular in her appearance with the hand-bag at that hour, she knew she was safe from comment.

The station was some distance away; she had never been to it alone, and was flurried when she found herself in the office; bought her ticket hurriedly, forgot some of her change, and sat down in the waiting-room with a loudly beating heart to watch for the train.

She was frightened, for she instinctively felt that she had been an object of observation to some gentlemen who were standing near the door. She did not raise her eyes, but she knew that they were staring at her, and one said loud enough for her to hear,—

"A very strange resemblance!"

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE THEATRE.

It was the "season" at Seaham, a pretty village on the coast; all the lodging-houses were full of visitors; there was a panorama at the town-hall, and Mr. and Mrs. Benedict Forman with their travelling company of "high-class artistes" had opened the tiny Theatre Royal, that was well situated close to the Marine Parade, so that the evening-beset loungers could easily find outside amusement for indoors. The Formans were actors of the old school, devoted to their art, and to Shakespeare. They were not rich, and could not carry about more scenery than was strictly necessary, so that the *mise-en-scène* was sometimes almost as destitute of modern artistic requirements as it used to be in the days of Queen Bess; but the acting was the thing, and it was supposed to carry the imagination of the audience along with it.

In this unsophisticated region it often succeeded, and the Formans being locally well-known and highly respectable, were much patronized by the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood. To-day *King Lear* was on the posters, and there was a prospect of a full house, for a London star was underlined for the title rôle, and the 'Cordelia' was to be undertaken by a very pretty young *débutante*, "Miss Grey," of whose future career greatness was prophesied by the Seaham critics.

"Miss Grey" was sitting on a rock gazing at the sea with soft and dreamy eyes; from her position she could see the carriages drive up from the station through the town; the trains were not frequent, and if Margaret were to come she could not miss her.

Michal had grown more womanly and much more attractive, for there was something about her that interested most people at first sight—something that went deeper than mere beauty of feature, and she had acquired a gentle dignity of manner that repelled familiarity from the loungers and *habitués* of the theatre.

As she sat there, book in hand, but not reading, two gentlemen who were on the beach stopped to look at her.

"Go on, Fellowes!" said one of them, "that is little Miss Grey. I know her, and must give her a word of encouragement."

"Wait, Stanford, surely that girl is one of the vicar's daughters of—that place where I was capsize last year! I should know her amongst a thousand—the middle daughter—no, the youngest!"

"Nonsense!" said Guy Stanford, "that is little Miss Grey, the new actress." And he was off before his friend could do more than whistle dubiously.

"Have you a word for me?" asked Guy, as he approached Michal. "I have come on purpose to see you act."

His voice took the low tone that she used to love, but Michal drew back, and would not see his hand.

"I am sorry that anyone who knew me formerly should recognize me," she said. "I have dropped my old name with all my old acquaintances."

"Are you married?" he whispered, bending down so that his eyes were on a level with hers.

"Married! Oh, no!"

"Michal Cleve can only be Michal Cleve. To me, the world does not contain another like her."

"If you knew me you would know that I hate flattery, and I am sincere in wishing to be alone," she said, with a haughty curve of her lip.

"But I love you, Michal; do not send me away. Why should you?"

"A year ago, if—if you had only said that."

"I could not, Michal, I was tied. I will explain everything if you will give me the chance to do so. Will you try to love me? I am free now; free, do you hear?"

Michal grew very pale.

"I will be at the theatre to-night, if Cordelia wears the rose I shall fling at her feet; I shall seek her."

"Ah! You cast away the rose I gave you!"

"No—no, Michal," he explained, eagerly.

"I lost it accidentally, and Fellowes could report that I wanted to go back and look for it. I could not tell him why it was so valuable."

"I do not feel as if—as if—"

"What, my sweetest?"

"As if you were true!" sighed Michal, but she loved him, and he was a man and knew it.

"Time must prove me," he murmured, as he shook her cold hand lightly, for the Formans were coming towards them.

"Here are some of your theatrical friends. I must return to Fellowes. Michal, wear my rose to-night!"

"My dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Forman, panting from the exertion of scrambling over the rocks and shingle. "My dear, who is that man?"

Michal was crimson, as she explained that Mr. Stanford was an old friend.

"Well, my dear, be careful of old friends; that one has been sneaking after you wherever we have opened. Benedict has watched him, and we were uneasy."

"He loves me," thought Michal, joyfully.

"Why should he take the trouble to follow me about if he does not?"

"I have not noticed him," she said; "and he has certainly never spoken to me until now."

Mrs. Forman was silent for a minute; she was extremely romantic and very good-natured, and she liked everyone to be happy, but she was wise, and knew the world.

"Be careful, my dear, and don't fall in love too soon," she counselled, thinking she would set her husband to make inquiries about this old friend of Miss Gray's.

"Now you had better come home to dinner; the train won't be in for hours, because they broke down at Barbury. Nobody hurt but the poor guard—the man that was so civil to us. We are going to give him a benefit. Oh, everybody knew of the accident two hours ago, and you have been sitting here all by yourself! Come, it is three o'clock, and we've a leg of lamb—and Hurstan Percival. There's a husband for you! His Lear will astonish the house!"

Mrs. Forman, with Michal, made a sort of progress to Vine Cottage, for everybody there met either stared at them or spoke to them; but the manager's wife innocently liked adu-

lation, and received it with regal graciousness. She did not forget to set Mr. Forman on Guy Stanford's track, however; and the manager, when smoking his afternoon cigar on the little esplanade, encountered Mr. Fellowes, easily fell into a little conversation, and possessed himself of some information concerning that gentleman's friend.

Michal was alarmed at the train accident, but repeated assurances that no passenger was injured calmed her, and perhaps Margaret was not in it—perhaps Margaret might not come.

The business of the evening was before her, and she was obliged to concentrate her mind upon it—a difficult task to-day.

"Shall I wear the rose?" she questioned, feverishly; for she doubted the man she was unfortunate enough to love.

She was dressed for Cordelia—an ideal Cordelia—with pearls and lilies glistening on her white robe and flowing hair, her delicate loveliness increased by excitement.

The small theatre was full to-night in honour of Mr. Percival, and when Michal entered with Goneril and Regan, last, but not least, her appearance was welcomed with applause, and the first act went splendidly; there was a recall.

Lear led his youngest daughter before the curtain; she did not raise her eyes, but a bouquet fell at her feet from a stage-box—a bouquet of glowing crimson roses—only roses—whose rich breath seemed to enfold her.

Michal took the flowers, and when she was in the greenroom she laid them carefully aside—they were his gift.

"Shall I—shall I?" she thought. "It will give him the admission he seeks. I will—I will! I love him!"

She detached one rose from the rest, and was fastening it into her dress when the manager came up to her.

"Don't wear a rose, Cordelia. You should keep to your lilies."

Michal laughed nervously, but she held her rose tightly.

"Mrs. Forman says that you met an acquaintance this morning," he resumed, confidentially; "a fine man—a Byronic, sentimental sort of man. He threw that bouquet. Did you know it?"

"I did not see from whom it came."
"Eh, no; you'll get dozens by-and-by. Humph!—a Mr. Fellowes (he was introduced to me yesterday). Mr. Fellowes is your Byronic friend's travelling chum, isn't he? Well, he was lamenting that Stanford was separated from his wife!"

Cordelia had dropped the rose, and was regarding him with wide, questioning eyes.

"Better tell her the truth," thought the good manager, ardently wishing that the truths were not so disagreeable.

"He has only been married a year, and she and his wife separated by mutual agreement. Didn't you know it? Dear me!" he continued, volubly; "it's the fashion to sneer at us poor players, and call us immoral because sometimes families don't pull together, and we make matrimonial mistakes; but everybody hears the worst of us at once—we don't wear two faces. But I'm wanted. Gas, do I smell gas? Of course; it's always escaping here. Put it lower. Don't let the people be fumed! It can't be a leakage, Smith?"

He hurried away, sniffing.
Michal stood as if stunned, then she had to ward off the conversation of Regan, who was fond of talking, and inquisitive about the roses.

There was a small apartment called the manager's office just behind the greenroom. Michal moved into this, keeping the door open that she might hear the call-boy; but despair was with her, an agony of despair.

She could scarcely think, she could only feel her pain. The noises in the front of the curtain came to her dully, but she heard her heart beating, and from an open skylight the roar of the sea and the wind entered and stayed.

The sea was very loud to-night; it spoke to her, as it does to all desolate souls.

They were shouting in front—shouting as they had never shouted before, and the roar of the tempest deepened. The air of the room became suddenly very close, stiflingly so; and as Michal gazed in the air she saw a shower of sparks rise upwards.

There was a fire somewhere—fire in the theatre. It was old, slightly constructed, and full of combustibles. Michal, with the instinct of self-preservation, rushed to the greenroom. It was empty, and dim with smoke; the door was tightly jambed, and she cried for help, for she knew that something was wrong.

The hubbub outside increased, the floor shook beneath her, and she heard her name amid the confusion.

She answered in her clear, silvery tones, calling, with all her strength, that she was in the greenroom.

With the roar of the sea was mingled another roar; the ceiling crackled, and flames burst through, and the girl shrieked in terror.

Suddenly blows were dealt at the door she could not open; it yielded, and a man dashed in, grimy, his garments burnt and torn; the red light showed her Guy Stanford.

"Michal!—Michal! you are here! My child, I must save you. Quick—quick! or we shall both be lost!"

He caught her in his arms and turned to flee, but the passage was on fire now, and he paused with a groan.

Even in that moment Michal shrank from him.

"You have a wife," she said, hoarsely. "You should have remembered her before coming here. Perhaps she loves you."

He looked distractedly about for means of egress, but the smoke blinded him.

There was a shout above them; a wall had given way, and men on a ladder were crying to them to hasten, and casting down a rope through the aperture.

"There's help for one person—only one. Who is there?"

It was the manager's voice, desperate in its terror.

"Who is there? Answer—answer, for Heaven's sake!"

The smoke came in such a volume that Stanford staggered back, and Michal sprang from his arms. She caught the rope in an instant, and as he was falling prone at her feet she wound it about him skillfully, and then she called steadily, as she knotted it fast, with all her feverish strength,—

"Pull—pull! as fast as you can!"

"He will be a good man," she said, with a smile that was heroic in its strange exaltation. "He will know that I loved him, and the horror of this hour will change his heart. Heaven bless him, and let me die, if I must die, without much pain! Heaven bless—"

But she sank down overpowered.

There was a great crash, and the roof of the theatre fell.

CHAPTER X.

AT THE VICARAGE.

It was winter time, and Calverdale was looking its worst, though its air was fresh and pure, and the days often sunshiny.

The vicarage garden was bare of green leaf or blossom, its long paths and pleasant alleys crisp with frost, but the branches of elm, oak, and sycamore made delicate traceries across the sky, and there was music yet within its bowers and ivied nooks, for the Christmas robin was blithe, and sang late into the evening.

The old garden, even in its winter dress, was a paradise to a pair of lovers who were slowly sauntering up and down in the early dusk.

"My Margaret, to think that our probation is done, and that you will be my very own to-morrow!" said Horace Deane, as he clasped his companion's hand more firmly.

"I hope I shall be a good wife," she answered, softly.

"If I believed in fate, I should say it was fate that led me to Seaham—that it was fate that brought you before my dear old godfather, who recognized his lost love in you, and persisted in following you to learn your name."

"Fate has a great deal to answer for."

"I wonder if you will be happy in Australia, my darling? When I was there alone, working and hoping against hope, I used to picture you beside me, and when I came home I was afraid—actually afraid—to seek you again. A most blessed chance helped me!"

"What should I have done at the station when I found I had to wait alone there for hours whilst the line was repaired, and my purse was gone, and when we came into Seaham and heard what had happened, I should have gone mad if you had not been there, with your noble courage and strong right arm. Dear, dear Horace, I owe my sister to you!"

"Nonsense, love; it was what any man ought to have done. I did not even know that I was rescuing our Michal when we dug out the ruins and found her living yet."

"Our Michal. Like you to say 'our.'"

Anne Cleve came down the path and joined the lovers.

"You will have Margaret altogether to-morrow, Horace!" said she, with a smile in which there was some gentle regret. "I cannot lose sight of her as long as she is at home. Papa is with Michal," she added, softly; "he went into her room without saying a word. I would have prepared her for his visit, but there was no time. She is so much better to-day, and the burns will not show much in a few weeks!"

"Mr. Cleve has altered greatly," observed Horace; "he told me last night that he quite approved of the step I had taken, that the wrong-doing would have been in forcing my conscience. I might be a better man as a farmer than as a clergyman, and I had saved a child for him, a debt he could never pay!"

Martha toiled towards them now, bearing a card. She paused midway, and made vehement signs to Anne.

"Some visitor, I suppose! How provoking not to be left in peace to-day! But people are all so kind now to us, Horace!"

She went to Martha, and presently returned in evident distress.

"What shall I do? This wretched man should not have called!" she said.

"Do you mean to say that Stanford has dared—?" began Horace, but Margaret laid her hand on his arm.

"Let me see him, Anne?" she petitioned; "it may be that he is anxious about Michal, and he must be ever grateful to her!"

She was allowed to have her own way, partly because Anne shrank from meeting the man her purity was offended by; the man who might have been Michal's ruin, and was nearly the cause of her death.

Margaret entered the dusky parlour, and Guy Stanford, much agitated, came forward to the light.

"How is she!" he faltered. "Not—not worse?"

"My sister is recovering rapidly! She will hardly be scarred!"

"Thank Heaven! I have been too ill to come before. May I see her? Your father never answered my letter!"

"I do not think you can see Michal, but you shall have the chance!" said Margaret, gravely.

"A thousand thanks!"

"I am only thinking of her, not of you, Mr. Stanford!"

She left him, and he heard her go upstairs, and waited in suspense for some time, then she came.

"Michal says it is better that you should not see her! She does not wish you even to remember her existence!"

"She saved my life!" he murmured.

"She bids you farewell through me," she says, "and wishes you to be very happy in making others so! Good-bye, Mr. Stanford!" They parted, and he went slowly out into

the winter afternoon with a sad, haggard face and a weary step.

He walked down the lane, passed the gap in the hedge of the garden, and a turn in the road out off the gables of the house from view, and he said farewell to the vicarage, but Michael dwelt in his heart for ever.

Mr. Cleve, changed, indeed, softened into almost another man, sat beside Michael's couch, holding her hand tenderly.

"I was harsh, my girl, I was harsh! But when I thought I had lost you I repented, and the love that had lain dormant in my heart for you spoke! I dared more to regain you than I did for the worldly comment!"

"You are reconciled to me, my father," said Michael, with a faint smile on her pallid lips, "but not to my profession!"

"That is another thing—another thing!" said he, shaking his head, but he did not look angry.

"You will love me in spite of it—will you not?"

"Surely so, Michael!"

"And you will be loving in your thoughts of me when I am far away in Australia?"

"Oh, Michael! will you really go?"

"Is it not best that I should, my father? You will have Anne and her curate always with you? I want change, and my art is dear to me! It is a great art, father!"

"Is it, my love?" said Mr. Cleve, meekly, but not convinced. "Well, we must not discuss it. Here come the others in haste! We shall be a large party!"

Michael turned her face, lovely as ever, towards them with a smile for a minute, then she buried it in the pillows, weeping.

"I wonder what my next experience of life will be!" she said, presently.

Mr. Cleve, wonder of wonders, bent down and kissed her. It was a solemn kiss. He was so unused to kissing.

"My daughter, you have taught me never to close my heart against natural feelings, or to fear to express them! Wherever you and Margaret may go, carry the same influence with you, and you will be blessed!"

"There's Mr. and Mrs. Forman below!" announced Martha at the door. "Are they to come upstairs?"

"By all means! They are friends of Miss Michael's!" said the vicar, rising to greet the guests. His conversion was complete.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

THE best thing in print—A pretty girl in a cotton dress.

EVERY time a doctor feels a man's pulse, his pulse experiences a chill.

WHEN a pickpocket gets out of practice, it takes a long while for him to get his hand in.

A GREAT many people say they write poetry to kill time. It makes the suffering public wish they would let time live.

MRS. GENERAL TOM THUMB would go shopping oftener than she does if she had more money. Her husband is always a little short.

THE spelling reform mania, which raged a short time since has passed away, and the man who spells cow with a k can no longer pass for a Greek scholar.

IT took eighteen gallons of hot water, two bars of soap, and an hour's hard work to get the dirt off a tramp, and he was at once seized with convulsions and came near dying.

A WORTHY Justice of the Peace issued a warrant charging a man with piracy on the Pacific Ocean, and he was quite surprised to learn that his jurisdiction didn't extend all over the world.

THE remains of a man have been dug out of the ruins of Pompeii, with both hands resting on his stomach. The building in which he was found is supposed to have been a cheap restaurant.

"WHY do you carry your purse in your hand?" asked a husband of his young wife. "Oh," was the quiet reply, "it is so light that I am afraid it might jump out of my pocket."

THE country newspaper now speaks of the man who has put a new pair of hinges on his gate and set out a lilac-bush in his front yard as "making extensive improvements about his residence."

WHEN a California man sees "no cards" at the end of a marriage notice of a friend he remarked that "that girl has put some pious notions in Jim's head, but he'll get over them after he has been married a while."

A GHOST supposed he had discovered a wholly new and rare insect. He sent it for examination, and the learned professor wrote back that it was an ordinary cockroach. That wise man had never been in the composing-room of a well-regulated newspaper.

"AREN'T you fond of gazing at heavenly bodies?" she asked, as they stood shivering in the morning air, watching the comet. "Yes, dear," he murmured, softly, as he looked her in the eye.

"MY face is my fortune, sir!" indignantly responded a fleshy young lady, when her suitor delicately attempted to sound her financial prospects. "It is certainly a large one, then," drily responded the young man, as he took his hat and came to leave.

"DON'T you think Parson Brown is a man of considerable ardour?" inquired a friend of Mr. Jollie. "No," was the reply; "on the contrary, I inferred from the exhibit made at dinner the last time he invited me to dine with him that he was a man of a very little ardour."

FRAGMENT of a conversation between young girls: "Do you know what a preface is?" "No; do you?" "Not exactly! Only I know that it is at the beginning of books." "Oh, well, then it must be the name as when we are courted before entering on marriage!"

"SAX, Dick," said the married man whose wife had been ill, "I've discharged that nurse we had, and I'm taking her place myself now." "Taking her place?" inquired Dick; "what part of her work can you do, old man?" "Oh, I can do it about all," was the reply. "I always was a sound sleeper."

"OH, George, I'm so glad you've come! I want to ask you how you like the new frieze we have in our drawing-room." George, who has not been received very cordially of late—"I'll do. I hope it won't prove to be the same old frieze. I don't like decorations in cold blood." "Well, I prefer decorations a little less frigid than yours myself." Where there is so much coolness there is little hope.

BROWN had been in love with a young lady, and asked permission to call her by the expressive name of some animal, which was granted on condition that she should have the same privilege. On leaving, Brown said, "Good-night, dear." "Good-night, bore," said she. Brown has since given up the company of young ladies.

"I SHOULD like to be excused, your honour," said a man, who had been summoned on a jury. "What for?" "I owe a man five pounds, and I want to hunt him up and pay it." "Do you mean to say you would hunt up a man to pay a bill, instead of waiting for him to hunt you up?" "Yes, your honour." "Do you belong to this town?" "Yes, sir." "You are excused. I don't want any man on the jury who will lie like that."

A SPECTATOR at one of the theatres in Berlin, as a young lady of the ballet made her first appearance, exclaimed, "Splendidly got up!" Another spectator, who sat next to him, made a polite bow and said, "Thank you!" "Ah!" said the former, "I suppose you are the father of the young artist?" "No." "Her brother?" "No." "Then who the dickens are you, I should like to know?" "I supplied the padding."

ABOUT SNEEZING.—Sneeze on Monday, sneeze for a letter; sneeze on Tuesday, something better; sneeze on Wednesday, kiss a stranger; sneeze on Thursday, sneeze for danger; sneeze on Friday, sneeze for sorrow; sneeze on Saturday, kiss your sweetheart tomorrow.

A SCHOOL Board man called to see why Johnny Winslow had not been to school recently. "Why," said Mrs. Winslow, "he was thirteen years old last week, sir! I'm sure he's had schooling enough." "Schooling enough!" exclaimed the official; "why, I did not finish my education until I was three-and-twenty!" Mr. Winslow, who heard this remark, looked at the School Board man a moment, and then exclaimed, "Lor, lor! you don't mean to say you were such a thick-head as that?" The official did not reply.

A MURDER ANATOMY.—He was a blind millionaire, and about to be operated upon for cataract by a skillful oculist, who was to receive fifty pounds as his fee. The operation on the right eye had been most successful. "I am seeing!" exclaimed the millionaire overjoyed; "I can distinguish the colours. I recognise my precious cash-box." "Very well, then," replied the practitioner, "let us lose no time, but commence at once on the left eye." "No, no," says the miser, "all things considered, I'll pay you at once twenty-five pounds. I had as lief remain blind in one eye, and save the other twenty-five."

A CARICATIST for a local directory recently called at a house, when the following conversation took place between the agent and the servant girl: "Does Mr. — live here?" asked the agent. "Indeed, that he does, sir," answered the girl. "What is his full name?" "He has no full name." "What is his Christian name?" "Deuce a bit do I know, for he's anything else but a Christian." "What's his first name?" "Oh, is that what you after?" "Yes, that's what I want." "Oh, his name is John —; that is, it was before he died, but I don't know where he is or what's his name now." The caricatist left.

IN WORKING.—"I remember," said a boy to his Sunday-school teacher, "you told me to always stop and count fifty when angry." "Yes. Well, I'm glad to hear it. It cooled your anger, didn't it?" "You see, a boy he came into our alley and made faces at me and dared me to fight. I was going for him. He was bigger'n me, and I'd have got pulverized. I remembered what you said, and began to count." "And you didn't fight?" "No, ma'am. Just as I got to forty-two my big brother came along, and the way he licked that boy would have made your mouth water. I was going to count fifty and then ran."

A NEW NAME AND AN OLD NOSE

AN amusing story is told in Germany of one of the "newly-baked" Barons of the Bourree. One of the Rothschilds, seated in his study, was told by his confidential servant that Baron So-and-so desired to see him.

"Baron So-and-so?" repeated the great man, searching his memory as he strove in vain to conjure up some remembrance of the nobleman craving audience.

"Yes; and he said he was sure you would see him if I only mentioned his name."

"I will certainly see him," replied the friendly financier, and the baron was shown into the sanctum.

"What!" exclaimed Rothschild, "is it thou, little Moses? How could I know thee? Sit down, thrice welcome visitor!"

But the "newly-baked one" had bargained for a different sort of reception.

"Pray do not address me so," he said, looking anxiously around. "I thought that every one knew I had changed my name."

"Thou mayest change thy name, little Moses, and heartily welcome, but thou canst not change thy nose. By the new name I did not recognize thee, but by thy nose I knew thee at once."

SOCIETY.

PREPARATIONS on an elaborate scale are being made at York in view of the approaching visit of the Prince of Wales during the holding of the Royal Agricultural Show. The streets will be profusely decorated in the manner incident to occasions of the kind, and the Guildhall, Fine Art Exhibitions, and other public buildings in Masonic style. Two of the ancient bars, Micklegate and Bootham, will have special embellishments.

ONE of the pleasantest afternoons this fine weather is to be enjoyed at the Fisheries Exhibition. Those who wish simply to see the collection, itself in every way worthy a visit, should choose an off-day, say Tuesday or Friday. Those who wish to see some of the most distinguished of the upper ten thousand, should make their way to Knightsbridge about four o'clock on a Wednesday afternoon, while those who are not afraid of the "madding crowd" may go with a certainty that they will see and be seen on Saturdays. The grounds of the Horticultural Gardens are in full perfection. The band discourses most exquisite music, and while prefer remaining indoors are entertained by the masterly performances given on the two grand organs with which the building is provided. Many hundreds of ladies have gone solely for a sight of the wonderful mother of pearl-fronted bedroom suite, valued at no less than seventeen hundred guineas. Many have also gone for the sixpenny fish dinner which is really a marvel for the money.

ASPIRY Gums was *en fite* at the recent marriage of Miss Florence Anita Eyre Coots, daughter of the late Mr. Eyre Coots, of West Park, Hants, and step-daughter of Mr. W. Selby Bowndes, of Aspley House, Aspley Guise, with Sir Robert John Abercromby, Bart., son of the late Sir George Samuel Abercromby, Bart., of Forglun, Aberdeenshire, N.B. The bride was attired in a dress of ivory duchesse satin, trimmed with old Alencon lace (the gift of her mother), tablier covered with pearl embroidery, train of ivory duchesse satin, edged with deep white emu feather trimming; diamond and pearl ornaments (the gift of the bride's mother and the bridegroom), and tulle veil, fastened with real orange blossoms. She carried a beautiful bouquet. The train, which was very long, was carried by four little girls in white lace frocks, with broad, crimson Surah sashes and bows, mob lace caps, and crimson silk stockings, and they carried baskets of red roses. The eight bridesmaids wore cream mousseline de laine, trimmed with lace and moire silk, with lace and feather hats to match; and each carried a large bouquet of deep red roses, and wore a diamond swallow as brooch, the gifts of the bridegroom.

A VERY stylish wedding was that of Mr. Godfrey T. B. Clark, son of Mr. George T. Clark, of Dowlais House, Dowlais, and Tallygar, Cardiff, with Alice Georgiana Caroline Strong, daughter of Mr. Henry Linwood Strong, of Seymour-street, at St. George's, Hanover-square, the other day. The church was filled with the wedding party and friends of the contracting couple, and others anxious to witness the ceremony. The bride wore an ivory white brocade satin, the pointed bodice being profusely trimmed with lace and orange blossoms, the front of the skirt edged with a wide flounce of the brocade, and the long, full train falling in straight folds from the waist. She had a wreath of orange blossoms and beautiful Brussels lace veil, kept in its place by diamond stars. Her bouquet was enormously large. The bridesmaids were dressed alike in white silk, the pointed bodices being laced up the back, and finished with square puffed lace flounces in front, and the box-plaited skirts made with paniers and waterfall backs; Princess straw bonnets, trimmed with white silk, small feathers, and aigrettes; and they carried large bouquets of roses, each being of a different shade, which had a very pretty effect.

STATISTICS.

COST OF THE NAVY.—The actual expenditure upon the navy (excluding the conveyance of troops) for each year from 1860-61 to 1883-84 has been published, and it appears that the greatest expenditure in any one of these years was 1877-78, when the total reached £12,846,348, the nearest to that being in 1861-62, when £12,094,110 was spent, but in the last-mentioned year £10,769,206 of the total was "effective expenditure," as against £10,485,442 in the first-mentioned. The lowest expenditure in any one year was £9,374,328 in 1872-73, and the next to that £9,509,655 in 1869-70. The expenditure for 1882-83 was £10,799,201, and that for 1883-84 is estimated at £10,620,700.

CHURCHES AND CHAPELS IN ENGLAND AND WALES.—The number of churches, chapels, and buildings registered for public worship in England and Wales, in which marriages are solemnized according to the rites of the Established Church, is 14,873, and the places of worship belonging to other bodies number in all 21,343. Of these, 6,469 belong to the Wesleyan Methodists (original connection), 3,895 to the Primitive Methodists, and 1,230 to the United Methodist Free Church; 2,603 to the Independents, 2,243 to the Baptists, 895 to the Calvinistic Methodists, 824 to the Roman Catholics, 495 to the Bible Christians, 375 to the Society of Friends, and 201 to the Presbyterian Church of England. Among the smaller bodies, the Jews have 60 places of worship, and the Catholic Apostolic Church, 47.

GEMS.

THE rich depend on the poor, as well as the poor on the rich. The world is but a magnificent building; all the stones gradually cement together. No one subsists by himself alone.

NATURE has presented us with a large faculty of entertaining ourselves alone, and often calls us to it, to teach us that we owe ourselves in part to society, but chiefly and mostly to ourselves.

In proportion as men are real coin, and not counterfeit, they scorn to enjoy credit for what they have not. "Paint me," said Cromwell, "wrinkles and all." Even on canvas the great hero despised falsehood.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PRUNE PUDDING.—Scald one pound of French prunes, let them swell in the hot water till soft, drain and extract the stones, spread on a dish and dredge with flour; take a gill of milk from a quart, stir into it gradually eight tablespoonfuls of sifted flour; beat six eggs very light, and stir by degrees into the remainder of the quart of milk, alternating with the batter; add prunes, one at a time; boil two hours, and serve with wine sauce or cream.

APRICOT pudding is made in the form of a roly-poly. Make a crust as for baking powder biscuits; then, after soaking and stewing the dried apricots, spread them thickly over the crust; roll it up, and steam it for an hour; before soaking the apricots, wash them; do this as quickly as possible; then the water you pour over may be kept, as much of the sweetness and flavour will be soaked out.

BUNS.—Two quarts of warm water, two pounds of sugar, one and a half pounds of butter, two ounces of allspice, six eggs beaten by themselves, one pint of yeast. Put the flour, yeast and water together about as thick as pudding, set it by the fire, let it rise to a sponge, and mix the sugar and butter together. Then beat the whole together, after rising, and knead in flour enough, but not very stiff; make the buns small, and brush them over with egg just as you put them into the oven.

MISCELLANEOUS.

HE who does no good, gets none. He who cares not for others, will soon find that others will not care for him. As he lives to himself, so he will die to himself, and nobody will miss him, or be sorry that he is gone.

No enjoyment, however inconsiderable, is confined to the present moment. A man is happier for life from having once made an agreeable tour, or lived for any length of time with pleasant people, or enjoyed any considerable interval of innocent pleasure.

THERE are in Ireland about ninety-three thousand houses with only one room in each, and that of the rudest and poorest kind. Of these ninety-three thousand one-roomed huts, most have floors of rough, damp earth and roofs of rotten thatch. Their walls are without plaster, and a hole in the gable serves them for a chimney. Into some of these cabins will be crowded a goat, a donkey, a pig, and several fowls, along with the occupant and his family.—Justin McCarthy.

GOLDEN coinage has been resumed at the Royal Mint after an interval of two years. The Mint can now turn out sovereigns at the rate of a million a week without stopping the coinage of silver and copper. The beautiful instruments employed for weighing them are now manufactured within the precincts of the Mint, and are a miracle of minute and ingenious automatic machinery. Out of every hundred sovereigns that pass over the balance, the fastidious little instrument rejects, as either too heavy or too light—but most frequently the latter—a number varying from five to twenty.

ARTIFICIAL AIDS TO BEAUTY.—The individual who can invent a material closely resembling the skin of the head will find millions awaiting him. Nature generally understands what is best when she gives a brunette black hair, and enlivens a very white skin with red cheeks, but in foreheads she really does seem to make mistakes, and by the judicious arrangement of hair a homely face can often be made pretty. The French speak of the "five points of beauty." When the hair is combed straight back from the face and grows to a point on the forehead they draw it to two other points in the centre of the temples, and to still two others close to the ears, and contend that no embellished no woman, no matter how homely her features may be, can fail to be attractive. Be this as it may, many a woman owes her reputation as a beauty to her coiffure.

FRESH AIR.—In former times, few people appreciated the value of fresh air; but now the tide runs the other way, and all the dull people have learned the phrase "fresh air," and insist on having what they call "fresh air" at any cost, and without regard to times and places. Two men will come into the spacious parlour of a club; the air, though warm, is much purer and cooler by five degrees than the furnace-blast of the streets that they have left. The incomers are entirely comfortable until one of them notices that the windows are shut. Then they remember the formula "fresh air;" the windows are ordered open; in comes the heated gust from without, laden with the animal refuse that forms the chief ingredient of the dust in our large cities. These intelligent men draw near the open window; they inhale the "winged odours" of the streets, they murmur their formula, "A little fresh air;" they have cleared their consciences, and are happy. And in travelling, what do we not suffer from this ignorant conception of "fresh air!" We have all seen the lady who must have the window open in the railway-carriage; in the summer she breathes the railway-sparks and cinders, and she catches a bad cold on every winter journey; nothing short of pneumonia will convince her narrow ignorance that there are other things to think about in travelling than what she calls "fresh air."

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

AMY.—Myth is a kind of gum-resin.

PHILIP.—The writ was properly served.

BROWN EYES.—The hair enclosed is golden brown.

T. W. S.—Your brother and yourself take equally.

MALTRAVERS.—We regret we cannot accept the poetry.

R. F. H.—The time of day varies in different countries.

N. C.—The family name of the present Royal Family of England is D'Este-Guelph.

S. B.—The lady can be sued under the Married Woman's Property Act.

A. S. B.—The bridge over the Manai Straits was completed by Telford in 1825.

DOMINA.—Unless specially agreed at the time of engagement the servant is not responsible for breakages.

LETTY H.—The Italian name "Morrigna" is the same as the English Morris.

F. B.—Contracts entered into by persons in their ordinary calling on Sunday are void.

NOM. COM.—General is the highest military rank next to Field-Marshal.

C. W.—Hematite is a well-known iron ore. There are two kinds, red and brown.

CALIMONIA.—Ben Nevis is unquestionably the highest mountain in these islands.

BUSINESS MAN.—Receipts for money were first taxed by stamp duty in 1783.

ALFRED S.—Lockjaw is curable. It is occasioned for the most part from irritation of the nerves consequent on a wound.

D. W. P.—It is libellous to publish anything which will hold a man up to public ridicule in his business or profession.

W. D. P.—Quinine is one of the best remedies for neuralgia, but should only be taken under the direction of a medical man.

ANXIOUS.—The dead languages are those such as Greek and Latin, which are no longer spoken by any nation.

JASON.—Ordinary express speed would be about forty miles an hour, but some trains are timed to do over sixty miles an hour during part of their journey.

E. F. H.—The wart can be cured by touching it with nitric acid, but care should be taken not to let any fall on the surrounding skin.

B. W. X.—The limitation for an action for debt is six years, after which the debt can only be revived by a written acknowledgment.

ALVANI.—The "George" was a gold coin, current at 6s. 8d., in the reign of Henry VIII. Allusion to it is found in old writers.

A. D. E.—Lady means "bread giver," from the custom which formerly obtained of masters and mistresses of manor houses serving out bread weekly to the poor.

DANCE-LOVER.—The quadrille was introduced into England very early in this century, and made popular about 1813 by the then Duke of Devonshire.

D. N.—Excepting the first set, it is not etiquette for married people to dance together at either a public or private ball.

J. R.—A gentleman should not insist upon a lady continuing to dance, when she has expressed a desire to sit down.

L. S.—A lady who undertakes the duties of a house-keeper but lives with the family, not with the servants of the house.

ELLEN R.—1. It is not proper to allow a gentleman to kiss you at parting after going out with him for the first time for a walk. 2. Handwriting ladylike.

ALICE.—1. The features are irregular, but the expression kind and thoughtful. 2. Apply immediately at the Dogs' Home, Wandsworth, and offer a reward.

STRANGER.—An advertisement in one of the most widely circulated daily papers, stating your age, qualifications, and salary required, would be your best course.

TOM R.—You are a yearly tenant and must give six months' notice, terminating at the period at which you entered the house.

A. L. D.—The authorship of the line—"Though lost to sight to memory dear," is not known.

J. W. F.—There was an old tax levied on the smoke issuing from chimneys called "Fumage," and vulgarly known as "smoke farthings." It was abolished at the revolution.

N. R. S.—1. Jane means the same as John, "the beloved of the Lord." Herbert means "bright lord." Hermione "an interpreter." 2. Hair is a pretty bright brown. 3. Handwriting very good.

C. L. V.—Ellen means "fruitful." The young lady named acted in anything but a lady-like and friendly way. The best thing you can do is to drop her acquaintance. No reason need be assigned. She will understand.

JEM.—The seven colours of the rainbow in order are violet, indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. They are the colours of the spectrum, and are formed by the decomposition of white light.

PANST.—1. It is not in good form when narrating an incident, to continually say "you see," "you know," &c. 2. Do not try to force yourself into the confidences of others. If they give their confidence never betray it.

N. Y. A.—You are not obliged to invite your escort to enter the house when he accompanies you home, and if invited he should decline the invitation. But he should request permission to call the next day or evening, which will be true politeness.

ROSE.—1. Groomsmen at a wedding are usually selected from the near relatives and friends of both bride and bridegroom, and are usually young men in society. 2. Their duty is to wait upon the guests into the church, and assign them their places.

ITALIANO.—It is a matter quite as much of the purse as of taste. Punch may be served either in silver, china, or glass, and the ladle may be silver, china, or ordinary electro-plate; the punch if well made will be just as well reheated out of either.

HETTY.—Coaches are said to have been invented in Hungary and were in common use in London in the reign of Charles I. Cabs were introduced in 1829, and omnibuses, by Shillibeer, in 1830. The first buses ran from Charing-cross to Greenwich.

R. S.—You can sue for a divorce *in forma pauperis* if you can swear you have not got £25 in the world and can get a barrister's opinion that you have a good case. An undefended divorce suit would, under ordinary circumstances, cost from thirty to forty pounds.

I LOVED YOU SO!

I love thee, dear, come back to me
My weary heart cries out for thee,
To see thy soft eyes radiant shine
With their old love-light, rare, divine;
And hear thy lips so tenderly
Speak low and lovingly to me—
My heart it cries with bitter pain,
For that will ne'er occur again.

The blossoms, beautiful and sweet,
That you so often brought to greet
Me, with their beauty and perfumes,
White roses, lilies, orange-blossoms,
And pansies, with their hearts of gold;
The blues they gave us all untold.
Why brought you not to me the while,
One lotus of the far-off Nile?

That I might eat it and forget
My loss of thee, the toil, the fret,
The cares of life; for I would cast
The memory of the far-off past
Away; for naught can bring to me
Thee, with thy voice of melody—
O Heaven above, alone can know
I loved you so, I loved you so!

I. A. V.

COLDSTREAM GUARD.—In obedience to your wish we repeat the receipt previously given to remove tattoo marks. Rub the marks well first with a saive of pure acetic acid and lard, then with a solution of potash, and finally with dilute hydrochloric acid.

CAR ME.—We would earnestly counsel the young women to stick to their own business, and not attempt to go upon the stage, a profession for which on their own showing they are totally unfitted, and in which they would assuredly not succeed.

"WHITE EYE" (Sligo).—1. We are willing to give our humble opinion to the best of our ability, and will return the carte if stamped and addressed envelope be sent with it. 2. Fair but eccentric. The capitals especially might be made more legible with advantage.

J. C. L. (Drogheda).—Londonderry is called the Maiden City because, though besieged by O'Neill in 1641, and again by James II.'s army in 1689, it was not captured, though the inhabitants were driven to the extreme of famine, the Rev. George Walker animating them to endure their sufferings till the siege was raised by General Kirke.

J. S.—1. A gentleman should not be offended if a lady that has declined an invitation from him is seen dancing with another. Possibly she did not despise the one, but she preferred the other; or she may have simply reckoned a forgotten promise. 2. Special evidences of partiality should, however, as much as possible be avoided at places where all should be courteous to each other.

ROSE F.—Try a little hard work. It is one of the best cures for melancholy known. You cannot possibly do any good by sitting with hands folded doing nothing but brood over your troubles. Take Longfellow's noble words to heart:—

"Let us then be up and doing
With a heart for every fate,
Still achieving, still pursuing,
Learn to labour and to wait."

CORA.—Taking all the circumstances of the case into consideration, the probability is that the best course for you to take would be to defer your marriage long enough to enable you to find out the truth about your lover. To marry him while you are in doubt, and while your parents are so deeply prejudiced against him, would be almost certain to lead to domestic unhappiness.

F. R. S.—It is customary for the gentleman who is the head of the household, in the ordinary family circle, to sit at the side of the table, in the centre, having plates at his right hand, with food near by. When all the family are seated, and all in readiness, he will serve the guests who may be present; he will next serve the oldest lady of the household, then the ladies and gentleman as they come in order. The hostess will sit opposite her husband, and preside over the tea.

P. N.—You are the first engaged young man of whom we have ever heard who is afraid of showing too much affection to the lady to whom he is engaged. As you only wish to show moderate affection, we presume you will be satisfied with a moderate return, and so suggest Marlowe's line—

"Love me little, love me long."

as an appropriate expression of your feelings.

ANDY.—It would be impossible to prescribe medicine for you upon such a vague statement of your case as you give, and it is very unlikely that any medicine would do you good. Your trouble proceeds much more probably from the stomach than from "nerves," and the proper remedies are to eat only the simplest and most digestible food, to chew it well, to avoid very full meals at any time, and to take as much moderate exercise in the open air as possible. As a rule, never take any medicine except under the advice of a regular physician.

FREDDY.—Your trouble with regard to your music is probably that you do not realise how much hard work is required to become a really good player upon any instrument. Without knowing your teacher, your exercises, or even the instrument on which you practice, it is clearly impossible to say whether or not fault is to be found with any one of them. Remember that one hour of intelligent, interested practice is worth far more than a whole day of careless, mechanical strumming. While you are at your music concentrate your whole mind on it.

M. J. F.—Although you did not exactly commit any breach of etiquette, or give the young lady cause to feel actually insulted, you certainly missed a chance to be polite and to pay a small compliment. You should have asked the young lady if she would not give you the pleasure of escorting her home, even though your services were not absolutely needed, and then she would have had the opportunity of declining if there were any reason why you should not accompany her. You should explain to her, at the first opportunity, that your neglect of her was owing to your fear of being obtrusive, and not from any want of appreciation of the privilege of acting as her escort.

BURNIEL VIRE.—1. Will one of our readers inform our fair correspondent who is the author of the following lines?—

"Sweet hours that are to make me blest,
Oh! fly like breezes to the goal,
And make my love, my more than soul,
Come panting to this feverish breast."

2. There is no fixed limit. The gentleman should be the elder, and as good an age as we know is about twenty-six for the bridegroom and twenty for the bride. The marriage referred to would be legal, but the happiness depends much upon the disposition of the parties and the strength of their religious feelings. 3. Poetry not to hand, please send another copy. Writing good.

EFFRA H.—1. The soup is passed to each one, who eats it, or pretends to do so. 2. After soup, the guest may accept or refuse whatever follows, as the menu affords a knowledge of what may be expected. 3. When dinner is over the hostess bows to the lady at the right of the host, rises, and all rise also. 4. The ladies having withdrawn, the gentlemen who smoke light their cigars, or withdraw with the host to another apartment for the purpose. 5. Coffee is usually served at table after the dessert, but not infrequently it is served in the drawing-rooms half-an-hour or so later. The hostess, in the latter case, usually sits by the coffee-urn, and the gentlemen may carry the coffee-cups to the ladies, followed by a servant, who bears a tray, upon which are sugar, cream, and often a handsome, low cut glass carafe of brandy. 6. After coffee, any guest may take leave, and it is not expected that the latest lingerer will remain longer than two hours after dinner.

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